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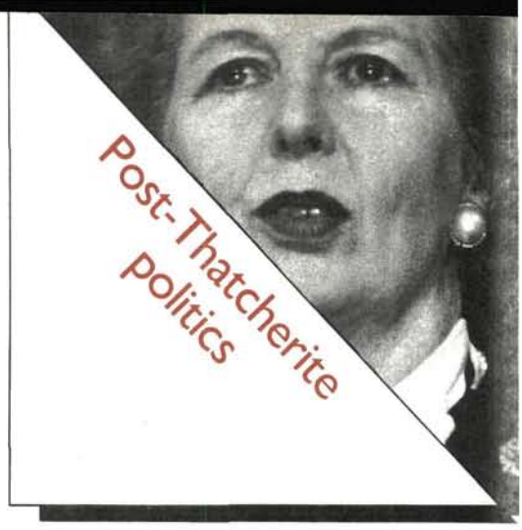
Ben Pimlott: Labour's defence hook



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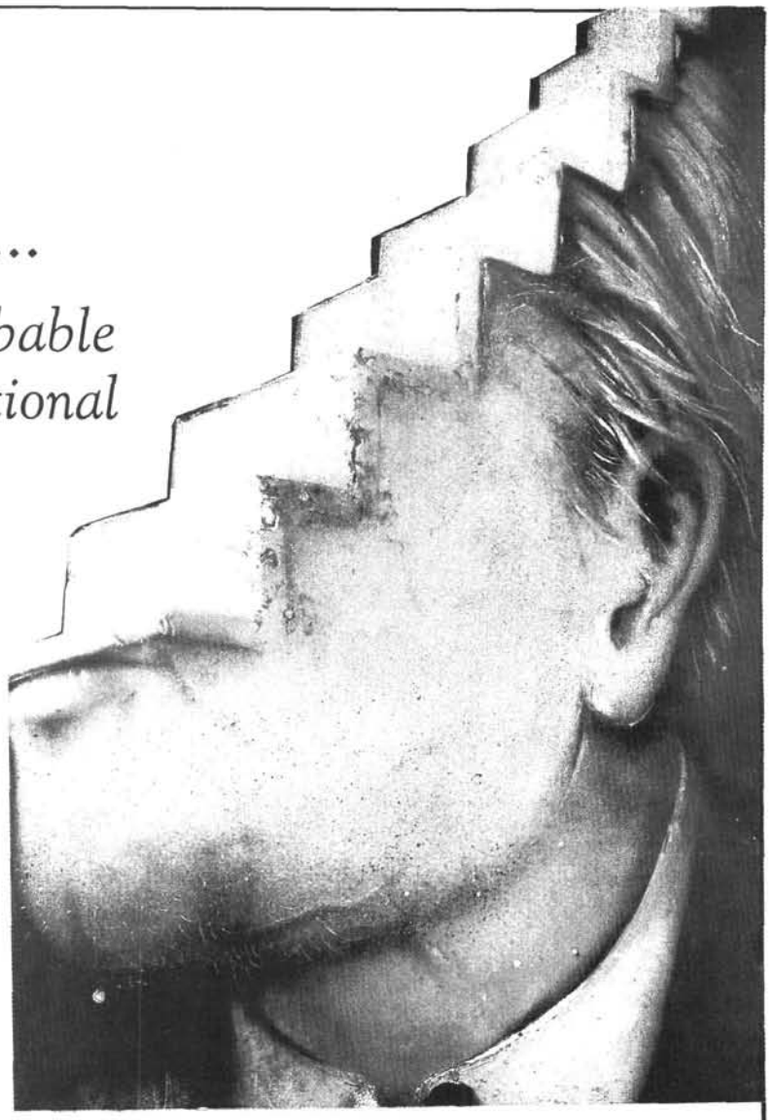

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NEXT WEEK

New Statesman and Society: Merger brings more pages and new faces with Sheila Rowbotham on sex and the sixties, Patrick Wright on morality and money, David Coate on the French elections, David Cannadine on Tom Nairn, and new political columns by Sarah Benton and Stephen Howe.

PLUS the opera boom and the new Detroit sound, football firms and dissident doctors

The ratings war

WE OUGHT no doubt to be pleased that the ratings war has replaced the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. When Gorbachev visited Washington last year, he won what was generally regarded as a public relations triumph — to the visible displeasure of the White House. President Reagan has now, in turn, won the away tie in the media with his homilies about human rights in Finland and Moscow.

We ought no doubt to be pleased also that human rights is being given such central importance in the foreign policy of one of the world's three superpowers.

But at this point doubts begin to rise about the advantages for Soviet citizens — and for humankind in general — of Reagan's forthright demands for "freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of travel" in the Soviet Union and the blanket commitment to human rights worldwide.

Of course, the Soviet people desperately need these and other freedoms which have been systematically denied under Communist rule in the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc. Equally evident, however, is the fact that the Soviet rulers have been moving very fast in precisely the areas which Reagan singled out — and that the impact on Reagan's bluff politicking in Moscow may as soon prejudice as encourage further advance. Unlike Gorbachev in Washington, Reagan wasn't pitching at his hosts. He was, first, grasping for the moral advantage by emphasising the limits to such freedom in Russia; and secondly, he was seeking to reassure the folks back home that he wasn't going soft on Communism. The western media played Reagan's themes for all they were worth, *The Times* even proclaiming that should Gorbachev pursue reform, "it may have taken an American president to show him the way".

Would that this were the case. Tragically it isn't. This is evident throughout the world, and nowhere more so than in the US's own backyard — Central America — where massive and continuing violations of human rights are engendered by Washington's policies and perpetrated by US forces and their proxies. Any claim which the American President makes to moral superiority must be accounted the most macabre of hypocrisies.

Reagan has had no occasion to condemn in the east the practice of "disappearances" — the kidnappings, torture and murders of civilians by security forces — which are a feature of US satellite regimes in Central America. For seven years his own administration has trained and financed the Salvadorean military which, by its own exertions and by those of surrogate death squads, has liquidated over 50,000 people since 1981. After a year in which 17,000 non-combatants were slain, the same tribune for human rights in Moscow solemnly certified in the US Congress that respect for human rights was improving in El Salvador.

General Rios Montt came to power in Guatemala in March 1982, declaring: "We will execute by firing squad whoever goes against the law." His army duly terminated the freedom of speech and association of at least 2,500 people by killing them over the next ten weeks. The pogrom brought to more than 100,000 the toll of political assassinations registered in Guatemala since the US intervened in 1954 to install and maintain a succession of petty Himmlers.

Reagans' verdict? That General Rios Montt "is totally devoted to democracy . . . they've been getting a bum rap".

It is, of course, more widely known that Reagan believes that the Nicaraguan *contras*, Oliver North and the CIA have been given a similarly unjust deal. For nearly ten years the *contras* have waged on his behalf the most bloody terrorist campaign, targeted especially at people who don't have the means to defend themselves; they have caused the deaths of some 50,000 people and ruined the Nicaraguan economy.

The World Court in The Hague ruled that Washington had broken international law by its campaign against Nicaragua. Reagan denounced the court. When it was shown that his proxy forces, the *contras*, shot and dismembered pregnant women and babies in a terrorist campaign which claimed 50,000 victims, Reagan hailed them as "freedom fighters".

The simple fact is that Reagan has in office pursued the essential goals of US foreign policy in Central America and the third world throughout the postwar period. The US has not, as Noam Chomsky and others have shown, been universally hostile to human rights and democracy; only when the aspirations of third world nations put (or could conceivably put) US interests at risk. The tragedy for the citizens of these nations has been that US interests have been pretty expensive.

The western media know their place. Such analysis is pushed to the margins. A world-weary realpolitik dominates debate about the conduct of international relations. But if Gorbachev and his allies make further progress with *perestroika* in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, Reagan's demands could prove to be the first shots in a war for moral ascendancy which benefits peoples all over the world. That's why it is more important than ever, soberly and without illusions, to insist on the rights of nations to self-determination and on human rights for their citizens. □

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DIARY

When I went into Dillon's last week and asked to be directed to books about the Royal family, the assistant looked at me as if I were some kind of pervert. I felt like one, too.

I have been thinking about the royal family a good deal in the past month, mainly because of Tom Nairn's brilliant new study of Britain's monarchy, *The Enchanted Glass*. One of the incidental pleasures of the book is the chapter headings. These include "T.S. Eliot and Claptrap: Fathomable Givenness", "Taboo and Idiot-Theory", "Sociology of Grovelling, Part 1", "Mystic Significance of a Small Bald Patch" and (more directly) "Are We All Mad?" The answer to the last question may well be yes, but I hope that Nairn's book will change all that and allow a public discussion of republicanism for the first time in living memory.

○

Nairn points out that even anti-royalists tend not to waste breath or ink on the subject; they think it essentially unimportant, a distraction from more serious issues. But an additional reason for the left's hesitancy is its sense that the Queen and Prince Charles are, in their own odd way, part of the anti-Thatcher brigade and therefore rather good news.

The Queen's antipathy to the Prime Minister is certainly real enough. "I'm surprised you people don't make more of it," a government minister said to me the other day. Well, we try. Here, for instance, is a story which I heard last week from what can only be described as an unimpeachable source.

In January this year, just before Thatcher set off on her official visit to Kenya, someone at Buckingham Palace discovered that the Kenyans intended to play the national anthem on her arrival at Nairobi airport. The Queen was furious. Her private office let it be known — to No 10, to the British High Commissioner in Nairobi, and to the Kenyan government — that HM would regard this as *lèse majesté*. Nevertheless, whether by accident or design, the Kenyan band still struck up "God Save The Queen" as Thatcher stepped on to the tarmac, which pleased her mightily. Another angry rebuke thundered from Buckingham Palace. To no avail: right-wing ministers are now baiting the Palace by trying to ensure that the offending tune is played on *all* Thatcher's foreign trips. Just to show who's boss.

○

I noticed another sign of the gulf between royalists and Thatcherites while leafing through the latest issue of *Royalty Monthly* ("The Best-Selling Royal Magazine"). "Norman Tebbit is to be pitied for his criticism of Prince Charles," an Essex vicar sneers on the letters page, "but one must remember that he is a sick and disillusioned man."

The best part of *Royalty Monthly* is the page of advertisements for pen pals, such as "American Princess Diana and Prince Edward fan would like to correspond with anyone. . ." A woman in Philadelphia wants to hear from people "who collect articles/pictures on the Yorks and are willing to trade their items on the Wales for my pictures/articles on the Yorks". A reader in New Jersey is "looking for information on the Royal Family, the British soap *EastEnders*, British lifestyle and current events. In exchange for this information, I am willing to send information on American soaps. . ." And an Illinois woman wants to trade press cuttings on Fergie for ones about Princess Di. "I also have," she adds enigmatically, "a collection on Nadia Comaneci."

○

Republicanism is, of course, only part of the new constitutional settlement we need. Looking through old copies of the *New Statesman* recently, I was surprised to find an editorial headed "The Case for Electoral Reform". It was published on 5 February 1944. (I was even more surprised to learn that the House of Commons held a two-day debate on the subject in 1944.) Proportional representation has, alas, had a bad press lately because of Jean-Marie Le Pen: Mitterrand introduced proportional representation and the French National Front won 32 seats in the National Assembly. Chirac has now reintroduced first-past-the-post and the NF will lose most — maybe all — of its seats in this month's elections. QED.

This very argument was anticipated by the anonymous author of the 1944 *New Statesman* piece. "PR undoubtedly makes it easier for a young party to establish itself," the article allowed, "but keeps its numbers within bounds when the tide runs in its favour. Under our majority system Hitler might have started in business a little later, but it is highly probable that he would have won an absolute majority before 1933; under PR, he never got an absolute majority at all." As if aware that this may not be *entirely* convincing — was the lack of an absolute majority much of a hindrance to the Führer anyway? — the writer hurriedly adds: "Nothing, to our thinking, can be deduced from German history, which differs too widely from our own." This is what's known as hedging your bet and eating it.

○

If William Rees-Mogg really wants to make himself useful he should address himself to a scandal which I first mentioned on this page eight years ago — the BBC's torturing of P.G. Wodehouse. Last weekend I listened to a dramatised version of *Right Ho, Jeeves* on Radio 4's "Saturday Night Theatre", and found that things had gone from bad to worse. It was a joyless production in which the main characters were played as if they were all more or less identical — mild, moderate types of medium intelligence. Bertie was not a chump, Jeeves didn't gleam with the light of pure intellect, Gussie Fink-Nottle was not a fish-faced freak and Aunt Dahlia did not have a loud-hailer voice acquired through years of shouting "View halloo!" In short, the producer — Peter King, according to the credits — was a cloth-eared twit who had never read a word of Wodehouse in his life.

Or so I thought at first. But then a ghastlier suspicion crossed my mind. Might the un-Wodehousean — indeed anti-Wodehousean — tone be deliberate? Mightn't it be like the Welsh National Opera's production *Don Giovanni* that I saw recently, which was set, inexplicably, in a post-Holocaust wasteland of dried mud? A glance at *Radio Times* confirmed the worst. Simon Cadell, cast as Bertie, was quoted as saying that we shouldn't expect a silly accent from him: "You can't get away with Bertie by putting on a funny voice." He added: "He's not such a silly-ass." It's a wonder Cadell's Bertie never joined the SDP.

In India there was a national uproar not so long ago when a television production of *Leave it to Psmith* transferred the story's action from Shropshire to Rajasthan and renamed Psmith "Rambo". Over here, the BBC can mug poor old Wodehouse in broad daylight without a whimper of protest from anyone.

○

Next week there will be a scintillating new mag on the news-stands called *New Statesman and Society*. And, with rotten timing, my publishers have chosen this moment to tell me that I must now write my biography of Tom Driberg forthwith or else they won't be accountable for their actions. So I shall be absent for a few months. Before I started doing this column again I had forgotten what enthusiastic correspondents *NS* readers are. To those who still haven't had a reply to their letters, my apologies. And to everyone who has offered suggestions, praise or criticism — including the journalist who yelled down the phone at me "you're a shit!" — my thanks.

Francis Wheen

ROGER WODDIS

Unfriendly Persuasion

I dreamt that Gorbachev flew in
To face the cameras and the lights,
And after smiling at his hosts
And matching them in heartfelt toasts,
He lectured them on human rights.

He showed the thickness of his skin,
As is the way with honoured guests:
He met the poor, the old, the sick,
He wept for people in the nick,
And struck a chord in British breasts.

The media gave a mighty shout,
The lapdogs laughed to see such fun,
And dissidents were overjoyed
(Especially the unemployed).
GOOD ON YER, GORBY! cried the *Sun*

And all the bells of hope rang out,
And those inclined to rhetoric,
Who knew the gospel of St John
And knew not sin, were called upon
To be the first to heave a brick

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For those imperilled on the sea . . . and under it

IF THE Department of Trade is to be believed, "Europe opens for business" in 1992. In four years' time we should see a massive growth in one of the most stressful and dangerous pastimes in contemporary Britain: trying to get out of the country.

Two weeks ago, 134 people on two British Airways jets joined the growing ranks of travellers who have witnessed a near miss, along with countless anguished air traffic controllers marshalling Britain's overcrowded skies. Closer to *terra firma*, ferry passengers embark on their journey with trepidation. Confidence is hard to come by with continuing uncertainty about the safety of the design of car ferries in the wake of the Zeebrugge disaster, and the National Union of Seamen's disquiet with the safety flaws it says are inherent in P&O's new working conditions for car ferries crossing the Channel.

There is little to allay the fears of the traveller in the future beyond the addition of another means of escape. For some, the Channel tunnel is a claustrophobic solution though Eurotunnel, the operating company, assures its shareholders that "safety is a principal factor in all design decisions" — construction is overseen by a special Safety Authority. Nevertheless, the Fire Brigades' Union is adamant that after two meetings with Eurotunnel it is still not satisfied with any safety considerations.

Reports that, less than a year into the project, construction of the tunnel is three months behind schedule on the British side will do little to quell such fears. Construction companies are under pressure to finish work by May 1993; they will face fines of £354,000 for each day they exceed the target completion date, up to a maximum of £165 million.

As the inquiry into the fire at Kings Cross underground station in London last November has already discovered, safety can easily turn into a secondary consideration on a public transport system. In April, lawyers acting for 24 of the victims at Kings Cross and counsel for the inquiry voiced doubts about the emphasis London Underground put on safety. London Regional Transport, the underground's operators, refused to disclose minutes of its board meetings to show the extent to which safety had been discussed. For ten years, LRT spent £2 million per year on safety, while £40 million was spent every year on fire precautions for the Paris *métro*. The Chairman of the inquiry, Desmond Fennell QC, has said the "100 steps" recently put forward by London Underground as part of an improved £30 million safety drive are inadequate.

No doubt Tony Ridley, the Chairman and Managing Director of London Underground, will take whatever lessons are learned from the Kings Cross inquiry to his other job. Dr Ridley was last week re-elected to the board of directors of Eurotunnel.

Peter Capella

See Barrie Clement on the seafarers' strike page 8.

New Statesman and Society

"AFTER THIS issue the *New Statesman* will enter on a new phase, the first number of the *New Statesman and Society* will appear on 10 June. But the change of form does not betoken a change of policy. The *New Statesman* is not, and never has been, the property of any party, nor the slave of any dogma . . . the union of the two forces will result in an enlarged paper, which, as an independent journal of the left, will include the best-known features and carry on the high traditions of both its predecessors."

In these words, though with a tactical updating, Kingsley Martin prepared *New Statesman* readers for the merger with the *Nation* on 21 February 1931. That merger in effect lasted for 26 years. Martin finally decided to drop the title from the masthead on 6 July 1957, "thus saving breath and printer's ink". He wrote at the time: "The combination of the two journals in 1931 was more than a marriage of convenience. It was that, of course, since, as rivals, they were never economic propositions, while in double-harness they quickly became financially viable. But it was also a "marriage of like minds . . ." He went on to argue that the N.S. & N. "carries within itself the great tradition of British radicalism . . ."

It's our view that this broad tradition encompasses both the *New Statesman* and *New Society* and that, once again, two separate forces can combine to produce a larger and stronger magazine which represents "a marriage of like minds". Your first issue of the *New Statesman and Society* next week will provide more convincing proof than mere words could now. The core of Britain's radical tradition, according to Martin, was that change, however drastic, should pass an essential test: "that it contributes more happiness, more welfare, more of the reality of human freedom". That kind of change is urgently needed throughout the world today, and it's the kind of change both the *NS* and *New Society* have always promoted. ●

Nurses' little helpers: care on the cheap

THE GOVERNMENT last week gave broad approval to the proposed changes to nurses education put forward 15 months ago by the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing and Midwifery (UKCC). Nurses at the Royal College of Nursing's annual conference in Brighton gave John Moore, the Secretary of State for Health, a standing ovation. Only the fresh air or the nurses' recently-fattened pay packets can explain the euphoria.

An analysis of Mr Moore's response gives grounds for concern for two reasons: first, the changes will mean most of the hands-on care will be done by non-nurses or "nurse helpers", putting standards of patient care at risk; second these changes smack of a plan to make "caring" cheaper.

Nurse helpers are likely to fall outside the remit of the pay review body.

The intention behind the UKCC proposals for changes in nurses' education was to draw student nurses out of the ward and to replace them with trained nurses, aided by helpers for the menial tasks, so that patients would be cared for by qualified staff. Recognition of a need for more nurses to provide such cover was implicit in those proposals.

The government clearly envisages a different future. Mr Moore gave no details of the proposed ratio between trained and helper staff but he did comment that there will be a reduction in the size of the professional nursing workforce.

Bob Jones, national secretary for the National Union of Public Employees thinks the nurses have been taken in. He sees a future where wards are run by one qualified nurse with most of the work being done by nurse helpers.

He claims this fits in with government plans to make caring cheaper.

He points to a pilot project in Oxford where the new-style nurse helper is being introduced. Negotiations with the management are sticking on how to define the role. The 100,000 nursing auxiliaries who "help" nurses on wards at present come under the aegis of the pay review body and have recently benefited from an average 9.5 per cent pay award. But the Oxfordshire management wants nurse helpers to be classed as ancillary workers. This year, ancillary workers are being offered only 4.5 per cent.

Pat Smith, senior nurse in research and development at Bloomsbury Health Authority, is worried by Mr Moore's response. "It undermines what nurses do. Nursing is about technical, physical and emotional skills.

"When a nurse gives physical support for a patient, she can ask about the deeper emotional worries the patient may have about their illness or prognosis. When you hive off these tasks to another, it destroys those opportunities."

Who will take on nurse helper jobs? Work that has been labelled as menial and is poorly paid is unlikely to lead to a satisfied workforce. Yet these are the people who will look after hospital patients in the future.

Pamela Holmes

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Labour gaining in by-elections

LABOUR HAS increased its share of the vote in local council by-elections, and managed a net gain of four seats since 7 April. The net loss of seats by the Conservatives, although small, is further evidence of the slackening speed of the electoral juggernaut.

The SLD vote has fallen back and it made no net gains, compared with four in the last Scoreboard. On the surface David Owen's SDP appears to have improved its performance. However, while it fought nine three-cornered contests, three-fifths of its total vote came from two Plymouth by-elections (one of which it won from the Conservatives). If it is not careful it will become a one-man, one-town band.

The Scoreboard identifies gains and losses in by-elections which took place between 7 April and 26 May 1988, excluding the full 5 May local elections. The by-election gains and losses table is as follows:

	Seats defended	Seats lost	Seats gained	Seats held now
Conservative	27	5	3	25
Labour	22	3	7	26
SLD	13	5	5	13
SDP	–	–	1	1
Others	6	4	1	3

Forty-nine of these contests were three-cornered. In these wards 130,343 votes were cast as follows:

Labour	43,960	33.7%
Conservative	50,676	38.9%
SLD	27,016	20.7%
SDP	4,897	3.8%
Others	3,794	2.9%

Labour's improvement was reflected in last month's full local elections. *The Economist*'s detailed analysis (14 May) shows that the Labour vote was the highest since 1981; the third party vote was the lowest since 1980, while the Conservatives did passing well for a party that had been in government for nine years. ●

COUNCIL SCOREBOARD

7 April

Salisbury DC	CON GAIN (Lab)

21 April

Braintree DC	LAB GAIN (Con)
Southwark LBC	LAB GAIN (SLD)
East Dorset DC	SLD GAIN (Con)

5 May

Derbyshire CC	LAB GAIN (SLD)
Rochester-upon-Medway DC	LAB GAIN (SLD)
High Peak DC	LAB GAIN (Ind)
Cambridgeshire CC	CON GAIN (SLD)
Brent LBC	SLD GAIN (Lab)
Newbury DC	SLD GAIN (Con)
Plymouth DC	SDP GAIN (Con)
Lancaster DC	IND GAIN (Lab)

12 May

Caradon DC	SLD GAIN (Ind)

19 May

Northumberland CC	LAB GAIN (Ind)
Wokingham DC	LAB GAIN (SLD)
Epping Forest DC	SLD GAIN (Con)

26 May

Bromsgrove DC	CON GAIN (Ind)

South African unions in the firing line

SOUTH AFRICAN workers are holding a three day national protest from 6 June. The country's largest union federation, COSATU, has called the protest in an attempt to fend off government measures which threaten its very existence.

The measures include emergency regulations which restrict COSATU from any "political" activity and effectively ban 17 organisations including the United Democratic Front. A strict new labour relations bill could also be passed into law within weeks.

The labour relations bill is the most serious threat that the fledgling union movement has faced since the Wiehahn reforms legalised black trade unions in 1979.

It aims to make it much more difficult, and in some cases impossible, for unions to strike legally. It then proposes penalties that would cripple any union that supports an illegal strike. Some trade unionists believe the inspiration came from Mrs Thatcher's anti-union laws, but the Pretoria regime has gone even further.

In particular the bill would make it illegal to strike on the "same issue" in any 15 month period, even though most recognition agreements call for annual wage negotiations.

The legality of union action would become dependent on complicated bureaucratic procedures which many unions cannot comply with. It would outlaw all solidarity strikes and boycotts. And, last but not least, an inspector can impose a 30 day cooling off period prior to a strike, which can in turn be extended indefinitely on the request of an employer.

The bill goes on to stipulate that if a union is any way associated with an illegal strike, it can be sued for lost production. Its assets may also be seized and its officials jailed. This would apply to wildcats strikes which weren't organised or authorised by the union.

In other clauses the bill reverses industrial court decisions against unfair dismissals, reduces the court's powers, and bolsters the position of small racial unions.

The unions can expect little support from business interests. Business leaders who only last year were making overtures to the African National Congress, are increasingly aligning themselves with the government.

Their motivation is partly political (revolution no longer seems imminent) and partly economic — last year COSATU members won an average wage increase of 18 per cent against an inflation rate of 16.1 per cent.

At a meeting with COSATU to discuss the labour relations bill, key business associates argued in its favour. According to Frank Meintjies, COSATU's publicity secretary, even traditionally liberal big businesses lined up with the government, arguing that the bill was needed to "restore the balance of power" between management and workers.

Ironically the unions' only potential business allies are multinationals which have rejected pressure to disinvest. Qualified opposition to the bill has come from the American Chamber of Commerce, and Shell has condemned it outright. "Now is the time when businesses can act", says Shell's South African chairman, John Wilson. "It is up to companies like Shell . . . to make their voices heard volubly and to make known their criticism and grave disquiet."

South African unionists are hoping that their British comrades will step up pressure on other multinationals. Since the effective banning of the United Democratic Front, the unions have become the most important remaining forum for legal opposition. The destruction of COSATU would be a crushing blow for the anti-apartheid movement. ●

Caption competition

No 70

A ten-pound book token to the most inventive suggestion as to what Mrs Reagan and Mrs Gorbachev are saying to each other while their respective other halves cap each other in the new-man stakes. Entries on a postcard, please, to be in by 13 June.

No 68: Winner

Lawson: "So it's sod off from me . . . "
Howe: "And it's sod off from him!" *(Philip Symes, Pinner.)*

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Dukakis anti-nuke policy may be bad news

DISARMAMENT WILL be an even trickier subject for Michael Dukakis, if he becomes President, than it has been for Ronald Reagan. Reagan was able to restrain right-wing opposition to arms control by compensating with ultra right domestic policy, on welfare for instance. Dukakis couldn't, making it harder for him than for George Bush to conclude the START treaty, cutting strategic nuclear weapons by 50 per cent, if, as is now likely, Reagan leaves office before it is ready to be signed.

The next President, from whatever party, will be constrained by commitments inherited from the present administration. Reagan's new Defense Secretary, Frank Carlucci, has reduced defence spending by $33 billion. But his budget assumes a two per cent real growth in spending over the next five years. Mr Dukakis, who wants to cut £10 billion more, and then keep spending level, would have much less room for manoeuvre.

Dukakis's difficulties are compounded by his weakness on defence issues. He says he would give greater emphasis to conventional over nuclear forces, but has confirmed his support for the NATO policy of first use of nuclear weapons in Europe.

His uncertainty about strategic issues is characteristic. Three different strategic missiles are presently at issue. The 87-ton MX "Peacekeeper", has ten to twelve warheads; 50 MXs are being deployed in old Minuteman silos. The 60-ton Trident II D-5, normally with ten warheads, is being developed for submarines. The 15-ton single warhead Midgetman, also under development, will be carried on a 100-foot-long truck. Several hundred of these trucks, normally parked on government land, would roam the prairies in a crisis.

Dukakis wants to withhold deployment of the Trident D-5, pending an agreement to abolish multiple warhead missiles entirely. He is opposed to Republican proposals for deploying a further 50 MXs on railway wagons. He has also declared opposition to Midgetman, which he regards as too expensive. At the same time he wants to negotiate a ban on missile flight testing. Critics have pointed out that this would leave him no counter to current Russian deployments of mobile missiles, and no prospect of modernising the missile force, a position which is not politically viable in the US.

His confusion about defence would have European repercussions. For one thing, Trident II is the intended replacement for British Polaris. And Dukakis would be under pressure, from both inside and outside Congress, to improve "burden-sharing", which means shifting a larger share of NATO spending to European shoulders. His emphasis on conventional, as opposed to nuclear weapons, offers Europe the prospects of further expense. For many European politicians, George Bush's Reagan-like policies would be more comfortable.

The US presidential campaign offers few crumbs of comfort to European disarmers. As it goes on, realistic END persons may find themselves trying to decide whether to support larger defence budgets and conventional rearmament in Europe, in order to improve the chances of a strategic missile treaty.

Felix Pirani

POLITICAL SKETCH

Clearing out the drones

Edward Pearce

HIGH TIME, I think, that the world was set to rights, or if not the world then at any rate the House of Lords.

Now in lots of ways the Lords has managed, against the odds, to be a thoroughly useful institution. It works hard, it does a fair amount of rejecting and sending back, it has displeased the all high.

Yet this was done by the least democratic legislative chamber in western Europe. No one sits in Pugin's splendours who was not put there by inheritance or nomination. In theory the House of Lords is a disgraceful compound of jobbery and primogeniture. In practice, *most of the time,* it is a more liberal and discriminating body than the present Commons.

The reasons for this are fairly clear. A bloc of 80 or so crossbench peers imports uncertainty and judgment of issues into the chamber. Also rebellion against party lines, though not alas on the American scale, is more frequent than in the Commons. They can't come and get you with little murmurs about "a word to your constituency association chairman". Lord Alport had the whip taken from him for persistent Heathism, a perfectly useless gesture, but the Lords retains, among its working members, the same spirit of rational debate. Arguments still count here.

However, the operative words are the ones in italic type. Two weeks ago Bertie Denham, like Belloc's Lord High Chamberlain "the kindest and the best of men", rounded up a full hundred non-participating peers who looked as familiar with the place as the policemen from Leeds and Stockport one meets in Bournemouth when the Conservative conference is on and the helicopters are flying overhead. Every insurance agent in Tasmania, estate agent in Cape Town, chairman of a national company ennobled by our own Prime Minister and every beet-bashing, kale-scrutinising Shropshire ruralist had been summoned for the great push in the high cause of Mr Ridley's duke-and-dustman-equalising poll tax.

As the rules stand, fair enough. Bertie was entirely within his rights and he did a brilliant logistical job. Though he may come to wonder whether it might not have been longer-headed politics to have brought in half as many and thus made the crude bias of the nominal chamber less obvious. But the rules don't have to stand and if opposition revival should be built precisely upon the revulsion caused by this very piece of legislation, what Michael Heseltine calls "the Tory tax", Lords reform could and should be part of the manifesto of both opposition parties and something on which they could sensibly agree.

The simple solution is to concentrate one's fire on the invading extras, the casual lookers-in. They are not part of the daily work of the Lords, they are little better than the bar of the Drones' Club on instant muster. There is no reason at all why a platoon of absentees should sustain (or obstruct) legislation. Accordingly the very least we should have in mind is a bill which identifies working peers as the House of Lords.

It would be sensible to exclude from voting rights for a term of five years any peer who in a given year failed to vote in 20 per cent of all divisions. That would require any loyalist to put in a spot of work for his privileges even if it would up the attendance allowance bill. In practice one doesn't see any of Bertie's yeomanry managing such diligence. Does it involve moving the goal posts? Of course, and what other response do you expect to the sudden fielding for a key match of the second fifteen as well as the first?

THE OBJECTIVE in Lords reform should be simple and should fall short of perfection, always a problem with the left. Does the second chamber constitute a restraint upon government? Is it impossibly biased to one political party? Of course, any democrat is attracted by the notion of a wholly elected structure. An upper house could be created, with off-year elections, which would reduce the patronage of at least the party leaders though we should be back at the "word with your association chairman" ploy fast enough.

Also there is something, however pompous it may sound, in elder wisdom. Nobody who heard Robert Carr's moving speech on the poll tax could think otherwise. The essential thing is to get an upper House with self-respect and independence which isn't dancing attendance on *any* party. The 23 May vote was an intimation that the hereditary and nominated house as it now stands possesses a fixed and usable Conservative majority subject to no movement of public opinion. In words I have heard attributed to a government minister in another context, "Democracy isn't all that important in Britain."

The Lords owes much of its rejuvenesence, curiously, to Michael Foot who would cheerfully have abolished it. He it was who affronted Our Lady by sending to the Lords, not ex-cabinet ministers but medium strength, middle rank useful people who just happened to have lost elections. It has been the making of Joe Dean and, very happily, the rebirth of that sensible man, Andrew McIntosh who, remember, lost a putsch. Such people give the Upper House the professional touch of an extended Commons and if nomination get them there then, despite the patronage involved, it has validity.

But any reform of the Lords should distinguish between "working peers" and honours for political and public services. The power to bribe and induce is an ugly one and only Edward Heath, perhaps to his political cost, really stood out against it. But there was a wider drift against spoils and Margaret Thatcher, moralist, Wesleyan, interpreter of Christ to the multitude, reversed it. The breath-taking cynicism of the Prime Minister on the topic of inducements remains an insufficiently remarked scandal.

However, if the Opposition parties would keep their thinking succinct and forego utopian abstractions, simply chopping Bertie's special reserve off at the knees, an intelligent, original upper House can be assured. To use a word normally best avoided, its highest aspiration is that of the maverick. It is, after all, the only whit of Jeffersonian balance our peremptory and rather servile state affords. Let us do something to conserve it in honest form. □

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Safety decided by trial of strength

ALL THAT remains is for Sam McCluskie, general secretary of the National Union of Seamen, to roll over onto his back and have his ample stomach tickled by Sir Jeffrey Sterling, chairman of P&O. The seafarers' strike at P&O European Ferries now seems to be heading inexorably towards defeat for the union.

The company has managed to improve its strike-breaking service week by week and P&O has the resources and the will to wait until the operation gets back to normal. The High Court, meanwhile, is not minded to lift the crippling sequestration order on the union's assets while "demonstrations" continue outside the docks at Dover — though the union has withdrawn its support for them.

It is the kind of experience with which the miners and printers can empathise. The P&O dispute, however, is different.

While the coal strike and the conflict at Wapping were basically to do with industrial issues, albeit played out on a national political stage, the seafarers' conflict involves concern for the safety of the public. Superficially of course the point at issue between the NUS and P&O — that of crewing levels — is a perfectly conventional disagreement. But there could be more at stake than people's jobs — however serious that issue might be.

The union has underpinned its argument for the retention of as many of its members' jobs as it can get away with by arguing that forcing fewer people to work longer hours is potentially dangerous. Invariably the Zeebrugge disaster is invoked in support of its contentions. In particular it points to the fact that the "Red Book" — the contract of employment with which the company is breaking the strike — falls short of the high degree of safety Mr Justice Sheen had in mind in his report on the disaster.

Management has argued that it would never countenance operating ships that were crewed in a manner which rendered them dangerous. The company points out that Department of Transport officials were invited to Rotterdam to check crews and vessels before they set sail on their mission to break the strike. Union representatives reply that the crewing systems in operation then were in excess of those laid down by the Red Book. Even now strike-breaking vessels have supernumeraries on board — largely made up of new employees who have taken strikers' jobs. They are there "to learn the ropes".

The problem is, nobody really knows who is right, neither the travelling public nor the labour correspondents covering the dispute.

Surely the only way the public could be reassured is through some form of independent scrutiny, which would listen to the company's views and those of the union but which in the final analysis would come to its own expert conclusions. I hesitate to use the unfashionable word "inquiry", but that is what it would amount to.

It may well be the case that the crewing levels introduced by the company are perfectly adequate and the union is quite simply trying it on. The only way to prove that to the outside world, however, is for expert independent adjudication. Already the International Maritime Organisation, Kent County Council and the Department of Transport have announced investigations into blazes on two vessels — one Sealink, one P&O — in recent weeks. What is required is a more general inquiry into ferry safety.

After all, P&O does not produce coal or print newspapers, it takes people across the busiest waterway in the world on vessels, which according to some international standards are inherently unsafe. In all this it is not necessary to doubt, as the union does, the sincerity of the company, merely its infallibility. The King's Cross disaster showed how unwise it is to dismiss union arguments about safety simply as partisan rantings.

If independent assessors made recommendations that rendered competition with the Channel Tunnel impossible, then we would need to ask ourselves whether the service should be allowed to continue in any case.

In the final analysis questions which might bear on public safety should not be resolved by a trial of strength between companies and unions.

Barrie Clement

The author is labour correspondent for the Independent

Steve Bell will be back next week.

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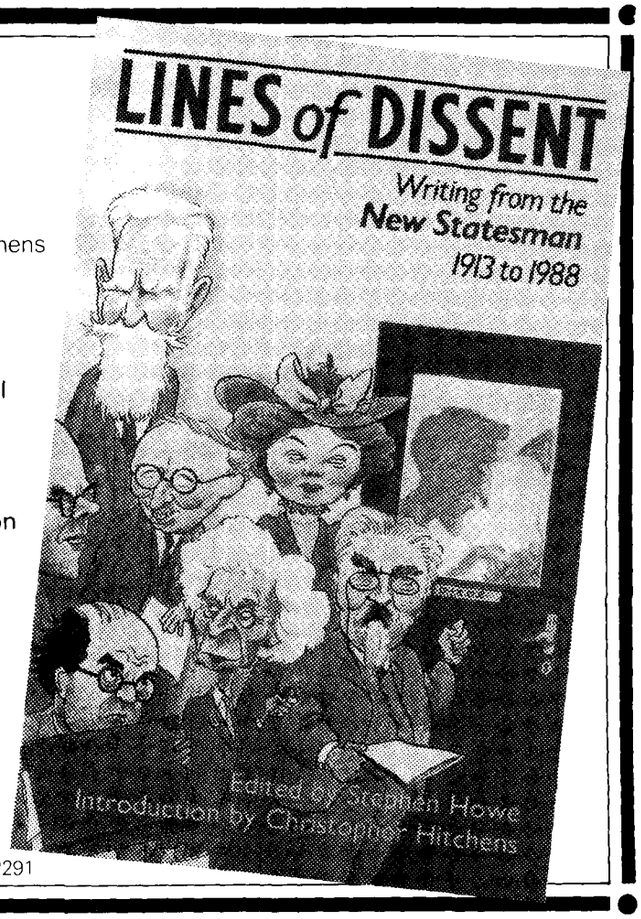
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BEN PIMLOTT

How Labour can show true grit by not dodging the defence question

IN A WEEK of superpower summitry, the most intriguing part of Labour's policy review is the dog that failed to bark: defence. This large, toothy and potentially noisy canine has been muzzled for obvious reasons. Yet until its jaw is loosened, any judgement on the review is bound to be premature. Is the Labour Party in 1991 going to have a non-nuclear defence policy or is it not? No more important question faces Mr Kinnock and his colleagues.

Embarrassment is the word that best describes the party's current stance. True, Labour never said that it would report on the subject this early. But one might have hoped for a bit more, in a 15-page interim document on defence and foreign policy, than four bland paragraphs. These declare the party to be in favour of virtue (arms reduction talks between the United States and the USSR) and against sin (Tory plans to undermine the INF treaty). They also promise a "comprehensive report" next year. Meanwhile, party and public are to be kept guessing.

Clearly, there is more to the nuclear question than finding the best policy. There is also the matter of the Labour leadership's own backyard. Here, it is possible to be too cynical. According to one view, Neil Kinnock knows that he has only one more chance to become prime minister. If he fails in 1991, party comrades and trade union brothers and sisters will be quite clinical in disposing of him. He is therefore frantic, even obsessional, about the need for policies — any policies — which the electorate will swallow. The crystal ball, therefore, gleams with a single world: "Sellout." "If Mr Kinnock had his way," sneers *Sunday Telegraph* writer Bruce Anderson, "Labour would fight the next election as the party of free enterprise, low taxation, strong defence, and law and order". Such a view has been echoed, bitterly, by the Bennite-Hefferite hard left.

Yet even if the Leader were not personally committed on the issue (and his past speeches show how important it has been to him), his wide knowledge of the labour movement would act as a restraint. Despite a lower profile in recent months, the influence of CND within the party and the trade unions remains formidable. The Campaign's 220,000 local and 70,000 national members (including an average of two groups in each constituency) provide a powerful leverage at every level. Meanwhile, among Labour activists unilateralism is still the touchstone of true faith.

Should the policy review group decide to ditch unilateral nuclear disarmament, it would certainly find a sizeable part of the Parlimentary Labour Party dragging its feet. Among the 100 or so members of parliamentary CND, the new, bright intake of 1987 has been particularly prominent on nuclear matters, often upstaging the more sluggish frontbench defence chief. This is not accidental. In the present House of Commons, there are more MPs than ever before for whom CND was a vital launch pad, and who reached parliament by convincing a unilateralist constituency Labour party of the strength of their commitment. Among the remainder, few have been prepared to take a boldly retentionist stance.

HOW MANY of the new boys and girls of 1983 and 1987 neglected to tell their selection conferences of their absolute determination to remove every single nuclear weapon from British soil within five minutes of Labour taking office? How many are likely to back down on the issue at their approaching reselections? Those who intend to do so are invited to write letters to the *New Statesman and Society*. My hunch is that there will not be enough to fill a column.

Meanwhile, quite apart from local activist concern, there is the attitude of big trade unions (the left-leaning TGWU, for instance) where traditions of unilateralism are deeply entrenched. It would be hard indeed to imagine a turnaround in principle emerging from a union-controlled party conference that has been backing unilateralist motions by large majorities since the early 1970s.

> *"The commonsense answer must be a compromise... not be the same as a Wilsonian sleight of hand"*

In short, the anti-nuclear commitment — easy to comprehend, rooted in a heritage of semi-pacifism, hammered and forged in the battles of the early eighties — retains a unique hold on Labour's soul. Yet, as everybody in the vicinity of Walworth Road and the Leader's Office is also aware, it is a colossal electoral liability. Rightly or wrongly, a policy that can be presented to the public by opponents as offering something for nothing is liable to stop any forward march of Labour in its tracks — as happened in last year's election campaign. Nor can we be confident that Labour will be so popular next time on other issues that it can "carry" nuclear divestment.

If common sense indicates that unilaterialism cannot be dumped, and also that it cannot be kept in its present form, what is the solution? The answer must be a compromise, which need not be the same as Wilsonian sleight of hand. Neil Kinnock might say that he would *like* to get rid of all nuclear weapons immediately but recognises that opinion is not ready for it.

In much the same way the Prime Minister has indicated her own predilection for a number of still unacceptable policies — capital punishment for instance. In the meantime, Labour should declare that it will pursue disarmament with, if need be, unilateral vigour.

Labour needs to pin its flag to the mast of true GRIT (graduated and reciprocated reductions intention). This far-sighted approach to arms negotiations was formulated in the early sixties, combining unilateralism with the hard-headed requirement of a response.

Between the absolutists of both sides — unilateralist and retentionist — there can be little discussion. Adopting the GRIT method, on the other hand, would offer to bridge the gap between those who favour unilateralism-plus-negotiation (Labour's 1987 stance) and those who sincerely desire disarmament, but regard negotiations in which the bottom line is renunciation as diplomatic nonsense. GRIT is a fancy name for gaining the trust of the other side, but not taking it for granted. Kennedy demonstrated it in 1963 when he unilaterally stopped atmospheric tests and helped to bring about the partial test-ban treaty. Gorbachev showed it in 1985 when he unilaterally called a halt to all tests for 16 months. Other unilateral gestures in East Europe have led directly to recent progress in superpower talks. The arch enemy of GRIT is Mrs Thatcher, whose militaristic chauvinism is summed up in her infamous pledge: "I will never accept the de-nuclearisation of Europe."

"UNILATERALISM and multilateralism must go hand in hand," declared Labour in its 1983 election suicide note, "if either is to succeed." The remark was seen as a muddled attempt to paper over cracks. Arguably, however, the point was a sound one, though obscured by the factional overtones of "uni" and "multi". Rephrased for 1991 it makes good sense: many-sided disarmament can best be achieved if one side takes a lead.

The success of such a strategy will depend on the international climate. A Dukakis presidency would be more hopeful than a Bush one, and the continuance of a Gorbachev-style regime in Moscow would be better than its replacement. Whether either condition will apply at the end of this parliament is impossible to predict, which gives Labour a good reason for keeping the details of its policy flexible. Nevertheless, the technique is applicable to most situations and a bold announcement of the intention to employ it could be made well in advance. For the purists there would be a sacrifice — though only if the renunciation of all nuclear weapons, regardless of response, continues to be seen as an option. The gain would be a believable promise to turn Britain from the most hawkish member of the western alliance into the most doveish.

"So far, you and we have more than 10,000 warheads each in our strategic arsenals," Gorbachev recently told an American interviewer. "Let us first cut these by 50 per cent. Maybe then by another 50 per cent and then once again. In the meantime, let us come to terms on the elimination of chemical weapons and start reducing conventional armaments in Europe . . ." It is a mark of progress that such a statement, which a few years ago would have been dismissed as propagandist bravado, should now seem attainable. For Britain unilaterally to show enthusiasm for such deals — while seeking to carry NATO with it — would be a major step, firing the idealism of Labour's most passionate supporters. □

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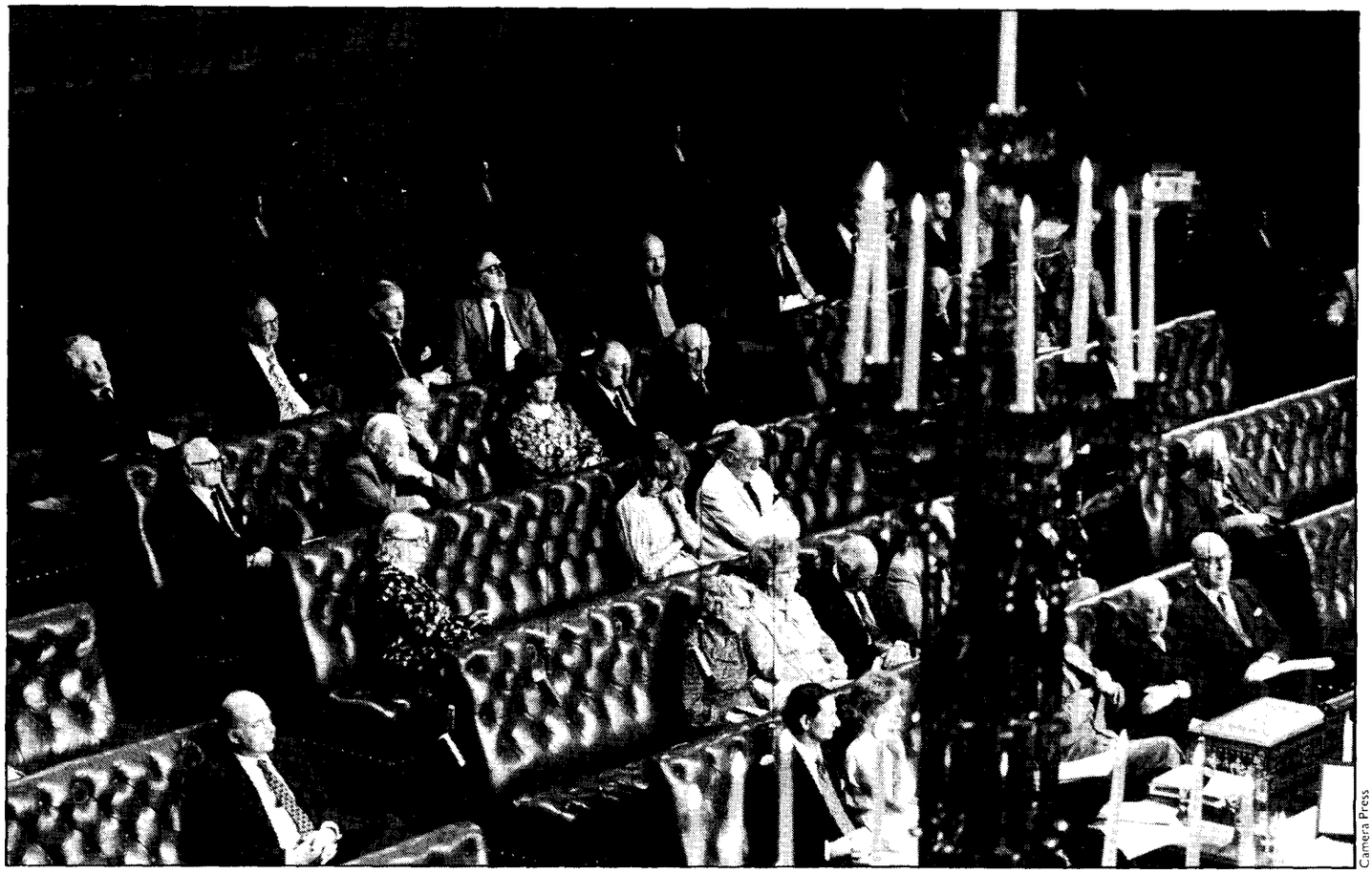

Camera Press

The Lords: the Not Contents have it

Since the Upper House disgraced itself over the poll tax vote, reform, abolition or just plain abuse has become fashionable again.* RICHARD HOLME *re-examines the constitutional issues

RATHER LIKE the current vogue for geriatric films, the House of Lords has made a come-back at the box-office. Both have one attraction in common, that of spotting familiar but now largely forgotten faces. "Isn't that Lillian Gish?" or "I could swear that was Alec Home sitting behind the noble lord at the despatch box."

But the appeal of the once and future stars of Britain's Sunset Boulevard, reinforced as it has been by the Lords' monopoly of TV coverage in the Palace of Westminster, is not enough to account for the re-evaluation of the second chamber which has been going on over the last ten years. Who in the Labour Party now readily recalls the strenuous efforts which James Callaghan had to make in order to prevent abolition of the House of Lords forming part of Labour's 1979 manifesto? Any suggestion of including abolition in Neil Kinnock's 1987 manifesto would have been met with polite incredulity, whereas a mere decade earlier the peerage and all its works occupied a central place in socialist demonology.

Is this change of heart on the left the result of a reassessment of the virtues of a second chamber? I fear not. It seems more likely to be a straightforward by-product of the partisanship which for most of the time is the only guiding principle of British public life. So the Lords, which between 1974 and 1979 was condemned for cruelly frustrating the wishes of working people as expressed by their elected representatives, had become by the tenth year of Thatcherism a bulwark, however frail, against the tyranny of a right-wing government. Indeed some of the arguments used on both sides in recent weeks have a deeply familiar ring. Like some ghastly role-reversal game of constitutional psychotherapy, Conservatives who once fulminated about "elective dictatorship" are condemning in the roundest terms any attempt to interfere with the will of the elected chamber.

The crucial difference is that Conservatives do not merely condemn the checks and balances which a second chamber imposes, albeit in an attenuated form, on the House of Commons. At will they can also destroy them, by drafting in the silent armies from the shires. About 530 Tory peers receive the writ of summons. By quiet organisation Lord Denham has now persuaded just over 400 of them to take the oath, and thus be eligible to vote, 40 or so more than a year ago. Thus, like Montgomery preparing for Alamein, the Tory Chief Whip has ensured that he can outnumber the enemy if he needs to, for Labour, the SLD and the Owenites have between them fewer than 200 peers who have taken the oath.

In self-justification the Tories point to the 300 or so cross-benchers in a similar position. What, they say, if they all combined with the opposition? But they never do, partly because many of them tend to support the Conservative government and more importantly because, despite heroic exceptions, most of them do not play an active part in the Lords.

Thus for all practical purposes, the Conservat-

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ives have a built-in majority which can be mobilised if necessary for the crucial occasion. As Andrew Adonis of Jesus College, Oxford, has pointed out, it is the government's ability to switch to this "voting house" which brings the "working house" into disrepute. The working house, consisting of those peers who play a regular part in legislative activity, is more fairly balanced — indeed arguably closer to the line-up of public opinion than the Commons itself — with about 220 Tories to 100 or so Labour, 60 SLD and Owenites and about 80 cross-benchers. Yet even here the government has taken no chances. Since 1979 Mrs Thatcher has improved her odds by creating new working peers in the ratio of seven Conservative; four Labour; one Alliance.

Nevertheless, it is a token of the doubts which Thatcherism has awoken in the minds of some Tories and cross-benchers, including the bishops, that the House of Lords, despite a line-up which is theoretically favourable to the government, has so often become a serious hurdle for recent legislation. Patronage is exhausted once it has been exercised, so the writ of the Whips runs less strongly than in the Commons, and the Conservatives sorely miss the emollient presence and crafty political *bonhomie* of Willie Whitelaw as leader.

Fewer insults

The working chamber has also a deserved reputation for two legislative virtues which are conspicuously missing from the House of Commons: information is traded more than insults and confrontation is supplemented by deliberation. House of Lords select committee reports are feared throughout Whitehall. All in all the working chamber is a body with more than a touch of unpredictability and independence, a nightmare for the Whips.

Lord Denham, who rejoices in the Woosterish christian name of Bertie, has not had an easy ride. Caught by under-mobilisation on earlier votes, he was determined to take no risks on the poll tax. The Prime Minister herself brought forward her end-of-term address to Tory peers and two weeks ago they were assembled to be lectured on their duty by the headmistress. This solemn occasion was marred by a deliciously mischievous division engineered by the opposition which ensured that the bell rang in mid-address, leaving many of the old boys uncertain where their duty lay.

But Bertie's misfortunes did not end there. Anxious to redeem himself he drafted in far more non-working peers than he needed and achieved such an embarrassingly large majority that his ruse became transparent.

At this point the House of Lords was back on the political agenda, with a vengeance. Lords Gifford and Scarman called for reform. Labour spokespeople condemned peers in terms worthy of Lloyd George's scorn for the Dukes who cost as much as Dreadnoughts. It was pointed out with justice that Lord Vestey, the third richest man in Britain, had made one of his rare visits to Westminster in order to vote himself an almost £5,000 reduction in annual rates.

The real issues

In all the brouhaha it is worth trying to pursue some constitutional questions, which might clarify what is valuable about the second chamber and what is not.

First, do we need checks and balances at all? Any notion of separation of powers seems Lockeian and unfamiliar in a constitution like Britain's which is unitary, centralised and top-down, and therefore Hobbesian in the way it concentrates power in the hands of the sovereign state. For those like me who believe in the dispersion of power there seems little doubt that we need to get away from Blackstone's notorious assertion that "absolute power. . . must in all government reside somewhere" and replace our elective dictatorship with a spreading and layering of power.

Second, is the House of Lords the crucial check or balance? There would seem to be many prior claims to reform. For instance: a Bill of Rights, incorporating the European Convention, to protect the citizen from abuse of power; Freedom of Information and a shift to open government; a re-balancing of power between central and local-government ascribing legitimacy to both; or a reformed electoral system to make the House of Commons more representative. But that is not to

Millionaires for Lords reform

THE MEDIA have blamed aristocratic Tory "backwoodsmen" for the huge vote to get the poll tax Bill through the Lords. It was the second biggest turnout in 150 years, which saw 500 peers crowding in to vote on 23 May, a figure exceeded only by the vote to join the European Community in 1971. It conjures up the picture of impecunious peers deserting their dogs and guns, leaving crumbling mansions set in unsaleable glens in the care of their last aged retainers to go to the aid of the party.

What the over-zealous Chief Whip Lord ("Bertie") Denham did was to call in almost a hundred of the wealthiest Tory peers on the Lords rolls who almost never attend but who stand personally to gain enormously by the abolition of rates. This was done to squash an over-publicised revolt which, days before, Lord Denham knew would not attract the two dozen Tory rebels claimed. These shrank to a round dozen.

The pressure on Tory peers was enormous. The Duke of Westminster, whose £2,500 million fortune makes him Britain's richest man, made it clear privately that he found the poll tax very unfair. He offered help to its opponents. But on the night he did not vote for Chelwood's amendment. But his banker brother-in-law, the Duke of Abercorn, who voted on only two major occasions in the last parliament, also turned up to vote this time. He is hardly a "backwoodsman". The Queen attended his marriage to "Sasha", the beautiful granddaugher of the late, wealthy Sir Harold Wernher of Luton Hoo; and Prince Andrew was a page. Although the abolition of rates will not yet affect his 2,000 acres at Barons Court in Ulster, or his home in the West Indies, the end of rates on his Little Chester Street home in Belgravia will come in handy.

The 9th Duke of Buccleuch, also the 11th Duke of Queensberry, will do much much better. He has a fortune of over £50 million, including 300,000 acres mainly in Scotland, which make him the biggest landowner in Europe. He also owns the 3,000-acre Boughton Estate just north of Kettering, with Boughton House, set in a 350-acre park. Although taxes have been minimised by splitting the estate's ownership into ten companies, the amount to be saved on the abolition of rates is sufficient to "incentivise" the Duke, who has been bound to his wheelchair since 1971 because of a riding accident. He rode to the aid of his party on 23 May, although his Lords activity has tapered off sharply of late.

The 4th Viscount Astor did not attend or vote a single time in the last parliamentary session. After inheriting £5 million from the American will of his late father, he seemed to be cutting his last connections with Cliveden, made notorious by pre-war Munichers and post-war Profumos; in 1985 he again became involved in converting it into a hotel. He will not save as much as the others on Ginge Manor, near Wantage in Oxfordshire.

More of a turn-up for the book was the 83-year-old Marquis of Bath whose vote to abolish rates was his first vote and even his first attendance in many years. Although he inherited his title in 1946, he has not made his first speech in the Lords in the 42 years since. It would not be fair to connect this with his fascination for Adolf Hitler's works of art. It may have more to do with his having been bottom of his class at Harrow, where his headmaster described him as "a moron beyond reach" who "could not be educated". He is still canny enough to know that he will save probably nine-tenths of his outlay on the ending of rates on his 9,500-acre Longleat Estate. He denies being worth £198 million, insisting that he is only a tenant for life of his family's estates. But he is entitled to its net income which will be substantially enhanced by moving from rates to flat poll tax.

There is no doubt about the financial canniness of the youngish meat multi-millionaire Baron ("Spam") Vestey, whose great grandfather paid Lloyd George £25,000 for the title, to the intense irritation of the King. Presiding over a network of 60 tax-efficient firms worth over £2 billion, he is a very rare attender and an even rarer speaker. He only attended three times in the last parliament and did not turn up for a single important vote. But he voted on 23 May. This was presumably because of the family tradition of paying as little tax as possible in any of the many countries into which their meat empire extends. His uncle Edmund phrased it well: "Nobody pays more tax than they have to; we're all tax dodgers, aren't we?"

This is not the attitude of all Conservatives. The independent-minded 7th Earl of Onslow, whose father was a Tory Deputy Chief Whip, voted with Lord Chelwood for a poll tax better related to people's ability to pay. "I think it is unfair that I should pay less than does my farm foreman," he tried to persuade fellow Tories, who knew he has a 700-acre estate near Guildford. "The charge is wrong and unfair to society as a whole," he insisted, listing those who had previously introduced it: "the more drunken of the Turkish sultans . . . the most intolerant of the Mogul emperors . . . the most weak of English Plantagenet kings." In the wake of Mrs Thatcher's churchy speech: "How can we, the party of the family, encourage people to kick their children out of the house? How can we, the party of the family, encourage people to send their elderly relatives into old people's homes in order to avoid paying the tax?"

Andrew Roth

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say that even if all these reforms were implemented, a second chamber would not be of value — as it is thought to be in about two-thirds of the world's remaining democracies. Until then we possibly need it even more as Lord Scarman puts it, "for the protection of our freedoms".

Third, what is wrong with the House of Lords? Most of its powers, those of initiating, revising and improving legislation, are a necessary supplement to the Commons and uncontroversial. Indeed even the nominal power of delay would probably be generally acceptable if the composition of the House were not perceived to be so deficient in both democracy and legitimacy. In a more democratically acceptable second chamber, there might prove to be a new territorial role to be played in respect of the nations and regions of the UK, as the Bundesrat does in Germany, or even in respect of the European Community, particularly if Euro-MPs became members.

Fourth, how could the House of Lords be made more legitimate? Over the years there have been many proposals for reform of the composition of the Lords. From the Bryce Conference in 1917 to the life Peerages Act of 1958 which created life peers, governments have wrestled with the problem of the Commons' aristocratic neighbour. Enoch Powell and Michael Foot, acting in concert as Parliamentarians, torpedoed an attempt by the Lords to reform itself in the 1970s. Even the Conservative Party in 1978 considered, before burying, a report from a committee chaired by Lord Home which recommended wholesale reform. The Liberal-SDP Alliance constitutional commission in 1982 made extensive proposals for reform which figured in its 1983 and 1987 manifestos.

A common ground of agreement for reform among those who want a defensible second chamber rather than outright abolition or an indefensible status quo would seem to comprise several elements: no voting powers for hereditary peers, with the more radical removing their debating rights as well; election of most peers, or senators, with various differences from the Commons suggested in the method of election, for instance regional constituencies and/or proportional representation; a substantial minority of appointed life peers of distinction, academics, religious leaders, trade unionists, business leaders and so on, with the powers of appointment removed from the prime minister and put in the hands of some sort of cross-party committee.

Fifth, what stands in the way of reform? There are some MPs who fear that increased legitimacy for the second chamber implies constitutional conflict with the Commons. The notion of shared power is plainly difficult for those who have been nurtured on the royal jelly of sovereignty. Yet the real obstacle probably lies more in the deadly mixture of complacency and partisanship which characterises the British approach to our public institutions. On the whole we get the system of government we deserve, where power without institutional limit parades in traditional ceremony to reassure its subjects. □

Richard Holme is Chairman of the all-party Constitutional Reform Centre.

Summer fun

With the Whitsun Parliamentary recess upon us and the long summer break not far away,* MAT COWARD *suggests some agreeable pastimes for the politically aware

THE GARDEN party season is here again, as no urban socialist with a walled garden will need reminding, and it's time to turn our thoughts to the entertainment.

Communal screenings of the *Chariots of Kinnock* campaign video are generally held to be in poor taste this year, now that Neil and Glenys look appreciably younger in the film than they do in real life. So it's back to the old stand-by — party games. Not just trivia quizzes ("Was the ice-pick which cured Trotsky's deviationism previously used or brand new?") but also classics like *To My Left*.

> *A player might, for instance, put forward the opinion that "Mrs Currie looks like a toilet after someone's been sick in it", and find themselves challenged on grounds of irrelevant personalisation*

The rules are simple: the host starts with a politically correct statement, such as "I'm not all that fond of Margaret Thatcher". The player to his left then has to prove that she *is* to his left by improving on the original sentiment, as in "Personally, I have a really strong and fundamental antipathy towards Margaret and her entire parasitical class", and this lefter-than-thou fun continues until no one at all can remember what the discussion was about in the first place, or, better yet, a real argument breaks out and people start hitting each other.

In very sophisticated company an additional element can be introduced by allowing challenges. A player might, for instance, put forward the opinion that "Mrs Currie looks like a toilet after someone's been sick in it", and find themselves challenged on grounds of irrelevant personalisation.

A recent favourite is *Pledge*, similar to consequences, in which each guest writes a transitional demand on a piece of paper, folds it, and passes it around widdershins. Hilarious results often ensue, as witness, for example, Labour's 1983 manifesto, compiled in this manner, which contained the corking line "And the world said: 'I'm buggered if I'm going to vote for this dog's dinner' ".

Forfeits are an important element in party games. Each contestant who drops a point can be required to drink a bottle of champagne-style Zimbabwean sparkling wine (not straight away, of course, that would be dangerous, but, say, at some time over the next three weeks).

Splits, a version of hide and seek, is catching on rapidly. For this game, the party-goers start off in one mass movement and establish a constitution for themselves. The gang then divides into two factions, over some personal slight or interpretational difficulty, and then into two again, and so on, until the entire company is made up of parties of one, each of them hiding in a different part of the garden and refusing to enter into dialogue with any of the others, at which point every player pays a forfeit; there are, naturally, no winners. But a word of warning: if the number of revellers is greater than twelve, *Splits* should be avoided, as the splitting process may take anything up to forty years to complete, which, even in Islington, is considered rather drawn out for these utilitarian times.

Selection Committee can be a good laugh: for this, you will need some chairs, a table, pens and paper, and an assortment of game tokens — say, three blacks, a lesbian and an unemployed seafarer. You then spend the rest of the evening ranting at each other, before finally picking an ex-public school lawyer and sending him off to Westminster, or the off licence, depending on how the festivities are proceeding.

The left-wing version of bobbing for apples makes splendid sport and is sure to get things off to a warm start. Invite your friends into the kitchen and have them search for South African oranges, Israeli avocados, etc. It's best to provide each contestant with an up-to-date list of banned objects, since these can change with bewildering rapidity.

If the hunters find anything incriminating, they are entitled to stone you to death with it.

Some important don'ts: *don't* suggest any game which involves stripping off, not just because it will upset the feminists present, most of them male, but because not all socialists wish to have their dirty underwear aired in public. Most do, of course, but it would be just your luck to have inadvertently invited one of the few prudes.

Don't give out prizes of great value, such as promises of support, insider tips on creative accounting methods, or phone numbers of agents in target marginals. To avoid jealousy and tantrums, it's best to stick to gifts of merely token worth, such as illuminated manuscripts of Clause 4; or of a jokey nature, like bound volumes of *Labour Weekly*.

You will know when your party is drawing to its natural close, as attendees begin to drift towards the television set to watch Ben Elton telling tautological jokes about "women's tits" not being funny. At this point, make everyone a lovely, soothing cup of Nicaraguan cocoa, and begin to say your goodbyes.

Was your do a success? That's not really for you to say, but don't worry too much. The wonderful, warm thing about the democratic road is that, even if things don't quite come together on the night, there's always tomorrow, or the next day . . . or 1992. □

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STATE OF THE NATION

John Rentoul

Who's afraid of the big, bad fridge?

TO COMMEMORATE the last issue of the *New Statesman*, here is a quiz. Which Labour Party politician said this, and when? "The changing character of labour, new housing, the new way of living based on the telly, the video, the car and glossy magazines — all these have an effect on our political strength."

Oh, all right, I cheated. It was Hugh Gaitskell, the party's leader, at its annual conference in 1959, just after its third defeat in a row. He didn't say "video"; he said "fridge".

But if someone got up at Labour conference this October and said that people voted Tory because they owned fridges, there would be much merriment in Blackpool's Winter Gardens. There would be jokes about the speaker being one cube short of a full tray in the ice box. And yet . . . Is the Labour Party not afraid that if the working classes own houses, shares, microwave ovens or a time-share in a "little place in Marbella", they won't vote Labour any more?

This fear is just as ridiculous as Gaitskell's fear of fridges. For all the media's saturation comment proclaiming that Britain has become a more acquisitive, individualistic society during — because of — Margaret Thatcher's premiership, there is absolutely no evidence that it has. Despite real after-tax incomes for those in work rising strongly between 1983 and 1987, the Conservative vote fell by 0.1 point in successive general elections. Opinion surveys show that, if anything, the public now cares more for the less well off and has become more collectivist in its views during the 1980s.

Question No 2. Which Labour Party politician said this, and when? "The cult of individual affluence emphasised values of selfishness, greed and materialism. Visions of a fairyland with a cornucopia of consumer goods for all individuals had great popular appeal. The mass market society pushed collectivism to one side."

That is a sort of trick question too. The answer is Eric Deakins, former MP for Walthamstow, in a book which isn't published until later this month. His book, *What Future for Labour?* (Hilary Shipman, £12.95), is a classic of the "Fear of Fridges" school of thought. Its title is an echo of a famous Penguin book published in 1960, *Must Labour Lose?*, which concluded that it wasn't inevitable, but winning was fast becoming impossible because the working class was shrinking, and getting richer. Before the 1959 election Harold Macmillan had proclaimed: "Most of our people have never had it so good". Then, as now, Labour voters were acquiring consumer durables. Before the 1987 election Lord Young proclaimed: "We've never had it so good for the 87 per cent of us who are working."

It isn't surprising that Deakins should believe that "a new set of dominant values [has] emerged". He has always been opposed to Britain's "addiction to economic growth". And he was one of the three Labour MPs — all in London — to lose their seats in the 1987 election. But the "Fear of Fridges" analysis of politics is only true to the extent that the performance of the economy is the strongest short-term factor affecting the way people vote. The south and east, and parts of London in particular, have done very well under Mrs Thatcher and have voted accordingly. But this doesn't mean that people have been converted to her *values* of individualism, private provision and free-market economics — not even in the south east.

IF THATCHERISM were a "new set of dominant values", then its central belief is that people ought to stand on their own two feet and not be dependent on the state. Yet, while in 1979 fully half the population thought "the welfare benefits that are available today have gone too far", last year that view was held by just one person in six, according to the British Election Study and Gallup.

"For all the media's proclaiming that Britain is a more individualistic society under Mrs Thatcher there is no evidence of this"

Nor do more people want to opt out of state health care or state schools. Even the free-market Institute of Economic Affairs found in a survey last year that, on the contrary, more people wanted to pay higher taxes for a better NHS and better schools for everyone. Since 1978, support for allowing people to opt out of paying taxes for the NHS and schools had fallen by between 10 and 12 percentage points. Support for higher taxes to pay for better services for everybody had increased by about the same amount.

Of course, most people approve of council house sales, the ban on secondary picketing and keeping Britain's own nuclear weapons. But they always have (and the minority supporting a non-nuclear defence policy is slowly growing). And of course the overwhelming majority of people who are working, whether working class or middle class, are substantially better off than they have ever been. They indeed live in a "fairyland with a cornucopia of consumer goods", from fridges to remote-controlled self-defrosting fridge-freezers. Deakins may be right to deplore materialism (I don't believe he is), but are people *more* acquisitive than they used to be, or do they just have more acquisitions? The consumer trends towards green and ethical products point in the opposite direction. And the crucial point is that, although most people are better off, the size of the relative gap in income and wealth between classes is not narrowing.

As for the government's belief that incentives and rewards are best left to the market, it couldn't be more out of touch with its electorate. Around 70 per cent of people think it "should be the government's responsibility to reduce income differences between rich and poor", according to the 1986 British Social Attitudes survey. And there's no evidence that this proportion has changed in the past two decades.

The Conservatives are beginning to sense that they might be out of touch. As David Marquand observes on page 21, Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Baker are staking their claim to a post-Thatcherite Toryism which accepts that there is such a thing as "society" and that citizens have a collective responsibility to it.

Mrs Thatcher and Nigel Lawson also claim to have seen the future — and it gives to charity. Charity is their brazenly invidualist answer to the public's unease about the morality of the government's relentless pursuit of "selfishness, greed and materialism", in Deakin's words. But it is precisely because the British people have *not* accepted this new religion that Mrs Thatcher has to lecture them about how compatible it is with their old one.

IT WON'T WORK. A more caring, co-operative fashion is bound to break into public life in the 1990s, because caring and co-operation are closer than individual charity is to "the best instincts and convictions of the people" that Mrs Thatcher invoked in Edinburgh two weeks ago.

The marketing industry is beginning to realise it too. Despite the fuss over the trend towards "ruthless" advertising, some marketing people believe that the future is friendly. Insurance company Standard Life's current television campaign features a single steel wire being twisted together with others to form a strong cable. The slogan is "We're better off together" — but it could just as well be "Unity is Strength".

And a few weeks ago the advertising agency KHBB produced its excruciatingly-titled forecast of consumer trends in the 1990s: *The Dawn of Us-ism*. After the fashion for Me-ism in the 1960s, and for "rampant survivalism" in the 1980s, the question for the next decade will be "Where are we all going (together)?" KHBB, whose clients include the Prudential, Carlsberg and Saab, predicts that "affluent altruism" is the wave of the future. Which political party will ride that wave? KHBB's Stuart Bull thinks it will be the Conservatives; and certainly Kenneth Baker could lead a paternalistic One Nation Tory party.

Baker could perhaps heal some of the most glaring divisions in society, but the Tories have no intention of creating the *more equal* "one nation" that the British people overwhelmingly want. Fifty-seven per cent of them even voted for it last year.

How to give political expression to that majority is the pre-eminent question to which I hope the *New Statesman and Society* will dedicate itself. It can't be a bad idea to add the *New Statesman*'s title to something that Mrs Thatcher doesn't think exists. □

John Rentoul is leaving the New Statesman to join the BBC's new politics programme, "On the Record", which starts in September. His book "Me and Mine: The Triumph of the New Individualism?" will be published in October by Unwin Hyman.

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SERMONS

Pauline conversions and inversions

CANON ERIC JAMES *finds that the Gospel according to Margaret Thatcher is theologically suspect*

WHAT DR JOHNSON was "surprised should be done at all", the Prime Minister is doing day after day. Certainly her address to this year's General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was regarded, with no little justification, as "a woman's preaching" by many commentators. It played upon the emotions; was not without its appeal to reason; was peppered with texts from Holy Writ; contained a considerable element of personal testimony; and was patently sincere.

But as a proclamation of the Christian gospel it was fundamentally flawed. The Prime Minister's sermon expanded her "starkly simple" conviction — stated even more simply in an interview in *Woman's Own* in October: "There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women and there are families."

Contrast this statement with a passage from John Robinson's *The Body: A Study of Pauline Theology*, recognised by biblical scholars as a little masterpiece when it was published in 1952 — before he became Bishop of Woolwich:

> Paul starts, as we do, from the fact that man is bound up in a vast solidarity of historical existence which denies him freedom to control his own destiny or achieve his true end. This is the "body" of sin and death, in which he is involved at every level of his being, physical, political and even cosmic. The great corporations of modern society are expressions of this all-embracing solidarity. The temptation of western man is to seek salvation by exalting the individual *against* such collectives or by seeking withdrawal from the body of socio-historical existence. Paul saw that the Christian gospel is very different. For the body is not simply evil: it is made by God and for God. Solidarity is the divinely ordained structure in which personal life is to be lived. Man's freedom does not lie in the fact that he is not bound, nor his individuality in the fact that he is not social. Both derive from an unconditional and inalienable responsibility to God, which is not denied by the solidarities of the body and can indeed be discharged only in and through them.
>
> Christians should be the last people to be found clinging to the wrecks of an atomistic individualism, which has no foundation in the Bible. For their hope does not lie in an escape from collectives: it lies in the resurrection of the body — that is to say, in the redemption, transfiguration and ultimate supersession of one solidarity by another. That is Paul's gospel of the new corporeity of the Body of Christ, which itself depends on the redemptive act wrought by Jesus in the body of His flesh through death.

Mrs Thatcher only believes in solidarity when it's in Poland!

The second serious flaw in the Prime Minister's sermon concerns the centrality, indeed the overwhelming priority, she gives to choice, enterprise, achievement and the exercise of individual responsibility.

There is an important truth here, of course, which "has a legitimacy which derives from the very nature of Creation" — a phrase which Mrs Thatcher, however, relates to St Paul's "if a man will not work he shall not eat". St Augustine was not the first to put a halo round the head of the *victim* on the Jerusalem-Jericho road as well as round the Good Samaritan's. The Prime Minister seems to regard victims simply as individuals who have failed. She has no theology of, and scant reverence for, the victim. Isolating the Johannine "I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again" she turns even the "wondrous Cross" into a sacrificial exercise of enterprise and individual choice. There is no "saving victim" in her sermon — or her book. But, let us be fair: her compassion does extend to the provision of a "safety net" for *certain* victims — with, of course, the appropriate safeguards: rigorous scrutiny to prevent "dependency".

The third flaw in the Prime Minister's homily concerns the Rule of Law. Again, there can be no dispute: law is of fundamental importance. But its authority for the Christian does not come primarily from the past, for example as "laid down in Exodus". For law to be respected it has to win its authority and be evidently related to the just ordering of society now. It is inseparable from social justice. It concerns not least that order which only society can create and maintain for itself. It does not come simply from above but is something discovered as people play their part — and there will be new insights as well as old — in ordering their own society and facing its glory and its shame: their glory and their shame.

The fourth flaw in the sermon was revealed in a single phrase: "our desire to maintain the essence of our own identity"; indeed, it was revealed in those two words "our own". I have some dealings with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and, in particular, with its education. It has a population today of 140,000, 20,000 of whom are Bangladeshi. In St Mary's ward the percentage is 50 per cent. I do not believe — as the Prime Minister clearly does — that it is Christian to conceive of "the essence of our own identity" as involving only the Judaic-Christian tradition. We are one nation. The essence of our own identity is in Him who — to quote St Paul — is "above all, and through all, and in all"; "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named". A Christian primary school teacher with a largely Bangladeshi class has to help all her class separately and together to discover "our identify". Surely every Christian, when they say "Our Father. . ." must envisage the Father of every family and know that the identify of one is involved in all.

Hymns an sermons

The Prime Minister was clearly brought up in a tradition in which sermons are incomplete without the verse of a hymn to end. Not altogether surprisingly, she chose "I vow to thee my country". But there was the final flaw; for it is no simple thing to give your country "entire and whole and perfect the service of my love". Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave it to Germany by opposition to the government and by consequent death. A true patriotism is not necessarily the same as following the flag to the Falklands.

And perhaps the Prime Minister did not know that hymn was written in 1918, in some bitterness of soul, by a British Ambassador who had just been summarily dismissed by his prime minister — as he thought, discourteously. He died within three weeks. A victim? Perhaps there is material there for another sermon from our Prime Minister. Let us hope not. □

Canon Eric James is Director of Christian Action, and the author of "A Life of Bishop John A.T. Robinson: Scholar, Pastor, Prophet" (1987)

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Doctors join Greens against opencast mines

Several valleys in South Wales have been blighted by opencast coal mining, despite promises of land restoration.

BRONWEN JONES ***reports on new medical evidence that the dust from opencast mines also blights the health of local people***

A SMALL South Wales town in the grey green Vale of Neath is an unlikely setting for medical history to be made. But doctors in Glynneath believe that they proved a direct link between severe illness in the town and its only heavy industry: coal mining. Deep mines have long been known to affect the health of those who work in them; in Glynneath the culprit is opencast mining and its victim is the whole community.

The link was discovered by accident. Two years ago an approach to local doctors by the Welsh Office querying high prescription levels prompted an analysis of the illnesses being treated. A blackened finger pointed to a common cause: coal dust. The doctors' evidence could have repercussions throughout the UK and perhaps beyond. If their findings are followed through there would be no opencast mining, or indeed any dust-generating industry, within 16 kilometres of a residential community.

Some facts of the case are simple. Dust is known to set off asthma attacks. Proving that the dust causes other medical disorders or comes from a particular industry has not been so easy.

Initially straightforward reasons for the high number of prescriptions in Glynneath emerged. "Some of the high prescribing was related to understaffing, with a short term solution being to issue a repeat prescription if there was no time to spend with the patient," said one local GP, Dr John Thomas. But when a much-needed new partner, Dr Mark Temple, came to Glynneath, he started to gather statistics. As he had been working in Yorkshire, health problems individual to South Wales were more apparent to him than to some of the others who thought them normal.

He saw that there was a high incidence of asthma and of acute febrile otitismedia (ear infection) affecting mainly women and children. The timing of the bouts of illness was also interesting. Dr Temple established that many asthma attacks came when the wind was blowing from the opencast site and that the ear infections, which in many cases affected different people, tended to follow after a short time lag.

The Glynneath doctors were encouraged in their research when they heard that a similar study had been carried out at the port of Rowhedge near Colchester. There, Dr Tony Snell had found that the high incidence of serious asthma attacks could be related to wind direction and to the type of cargo being unloaded at the port. The worst offenders were soya, fertiliser and grain. After looking at the South Wales study, he also found that the number of ear infections was higher than the national average. Both illnesses follow the same pattern in Glynneath with a short time lag before the ear infections take effect.

The Glynneath doctors' survey also revealed unusually high incidence of other illnesses. While occasional bouts of diarrhoea and vomiting in any population are commonplace, they found it was a continual problem with their patients. The number of cases of rheumatoid arthritis was also higher than average, as was peptic ulceration which is related to the ingestion of coal dust.

Until now ill health in such communities has been attributed in general terms to socio-economic factors. Yet Glynneath's unemployment rate of about 15 per cent does not compare unfavourably with the level in an area such as Kent (between 15 and 20 per cent) where the population is much healthier.

The doctors' data have now been given a wider

Bronwen Jones

This pine tree is 25 years old (see pencil for scale); local people joke: "Would you like to see our Bonsai forest? We hope it will attract Japanese tourists and investors"

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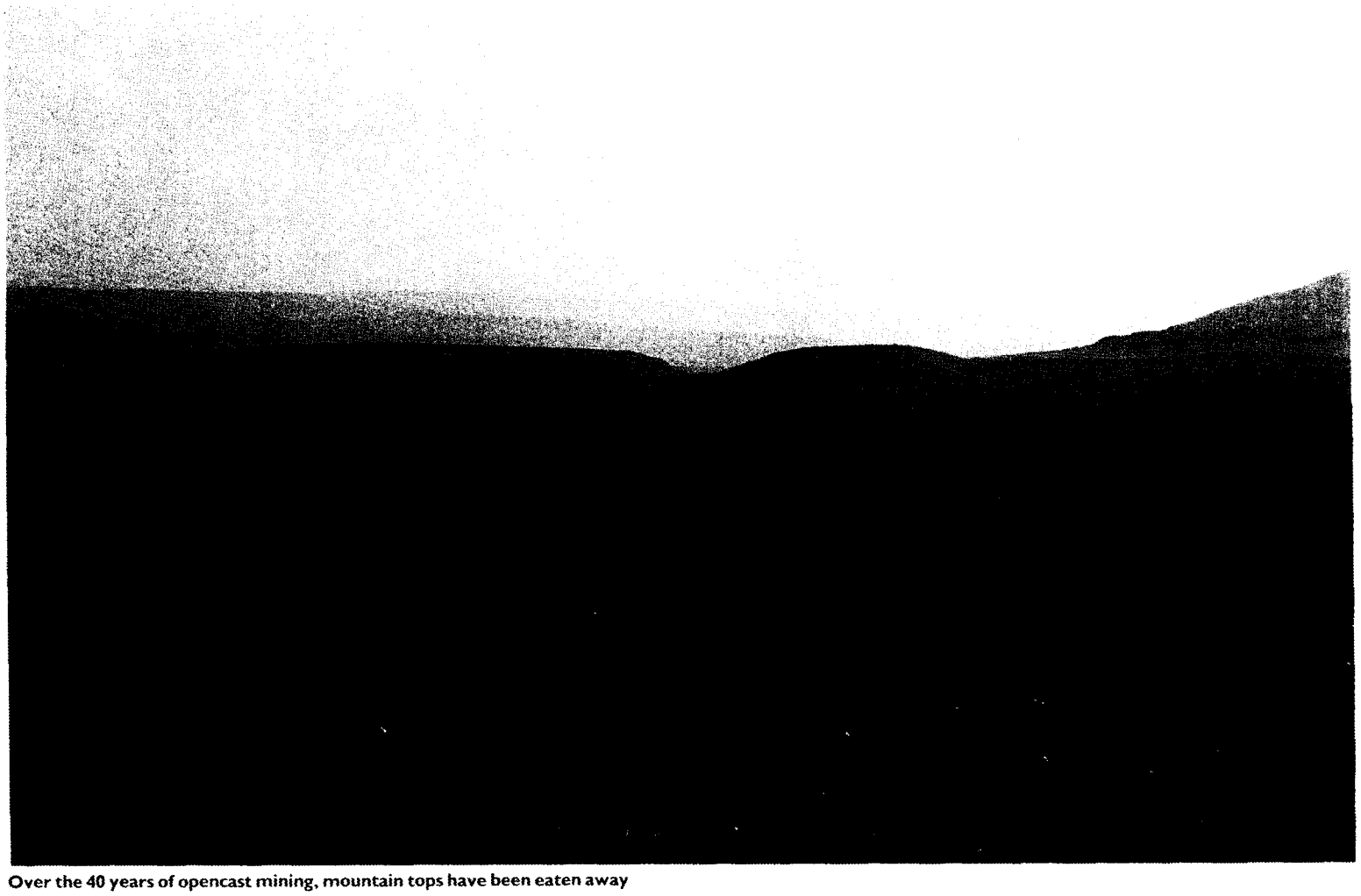

Bronwen Jones

Over the 40 years of opencast mining, mountain tops have been eaten away

audience, and were presented at a public inquiry into the proposed siting on the edge of the town of a new 130-hectare opencast site by British Coal's Opencast Executive. "To remain silent would be to neglect our patients," they said. "We believe the benefit of this action will be apparent to our patients within 30 years."

British Coal had said that it did not intend to present any medical evidence at the inquiry, but, faced with the doctors' study, produced its own doctor who attempted to discredit their material.

Sliced mountain-tops

The company uses a series of arguments to promote opencast coal mining. It is comparatively cheap; the dramatic limb-tearing accidents underground are rarely repeated on the surface; and in some areas the ground has been reinstated exceptionally well. Most of the coal, either by its geology or the method of mining, is only of use in power stations. The cost of the mined mineral is measured not in pounds a tonne, but in pounds per gigajoule of energy it produces. Last year the Opencast Executive in England and Wales produced 10.9 million tonnes of coal at £1.02 a gigajoule, while deep-mined coal cost £1.60 a gigajoule.

The Department of Environment inspector, Mr John Walley, representing the Secretary of State, has presided over other such inquiries and is no doubt used to the usual battle between environmental concerns and the promise of jobs and economic progress. It is still to be seen how much weight he will give to the new medical evidence when he produces his report in a few months' time.

When the departments of Environment and Energy issue guidelines on opencast mining soon, no big policy changes are expected.

Yet the environmental arguments were strong enough. Glynneath has suffered more than many communities. Over the 40 years of opencast mining, mountain tops have literally been eaten away. There are gouges in the hillside several kilometres across, where once there were Roman roads through oak woods and open fields. The town, strung along the valley floor, has no place to go, as the threatening black mesh of planned and actual opencast workings stretches towards it from every direction.

To describe one hilltop as a lunar landscape would be unfair. The moon was never so ugly. In fact there is no hilltop. Half-hearted attempts have been made to reinstate the land on some of the sites. Its topography is not retained; ancient roadways have been replaced by "more convenient" routes. Saplings have been planted. Where they have grown, the rows and rows of conifers that have replaced the indigenous mixed woodland make the hillside look as if a giant has combed its hair.

> *'To describe one hilltop as a lunar landscape would be unfair. The moon was never so ugly. In fact there is no hilltop. Half-hearted attempts have been made to reinstate the land on some of the sites. Ancient roadways have been replaced by more convenient routes. Saplings have been planted'*

Many trees do not grow at all. Careless, even callous, contractors have removed the topsoil or ploughed it in with the broken rock from several metres below. Glynneath residents joke, with a grimace: "Would you like to see our Bonsai forest? We hope it will attract Japanese tourists and investors." Acres of stunted pine trees, 25 years old and only a foot high, struggle through the black poisoned soil.

These arguments are often not strong enough to counter the option of cheap opencast mining with its promise of land restoration. They appear emotive and unrealistic in the modern world. An outsider may feel sympathetic but wonder whether the outcry is exaggerated. And, if it is not on your own back doorstep . . . But one visit, with the lorries thundering down the hillside, sick children little taller than the sick trees, boarded up houses on the edge of the decapitated hill and white tufa mineral deposits contaminating the Nant Pergwyn stream, should convince anyone that a search for alternatives is critical.

It was not just a Welshman's poetic soul that made a middle-aged man point wistfully at some of the remaining woodland and say: "I don't go walking any more. It all used to be beautiful like that." He turned away, coughing black dust into his handkerchief. □

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A fallen giant looks for *Khozraschot*

Behind Gorbachev's insistence on perestroika lies the imperative of a Soviet economy in ruins.* MARK JONES *reports from Moscow on attempts to free the economy from the bureaucrats

NOT SO LONG ago an excavator appeared outside my flat in Moscow and workmen began re-laying the mains for the district heat-and-power system. They were at work all over Moscow. The work needed doing, but it was fairly pointless for the warmer weather will fracture many newly laid pipes. Everyone knew it, but no one knew how to stop a perk traditionally enjoyed by building workers.

They got away with it because the Soviet construction industry is in a mess of heroic proportions. Halfway through a five-year plan abandoned by the government under *perestroika* the Soviet Union is littered with a staggering 350,000 unfinished building projects — and with only twelve building workers available for every site, it is obvious that most of the projects will never get done.

An episode at Ust-Ilim, which could be multiplied hundreds of times, involved a timber enterprise which decided to build a hospital for its staff. It was to be ready in May 1985 — at which time five million roubles worth of western technology was delivered to the site. The project is still unfinished; the equipment lies exposed to the elements.

Attempts at restructuring the building industry began several years ago. But the reforms introduced then only made the mess worse. The government decided to devolve the Construction Ministry, closing its Moscow headquarters and opening four regional centres instead. The idea was to reduce over-centralisation and make the industry more responsive to local needs. The results of this well-intentioned reform were little short of catastrophic. Orders continued to arrive from Moscow, the bureaucracy acquired three extra tiers and (as one harassed regional administrator told *Pravda*), the only "benefit" was a 30 per cent increase in travel expenses because of a bureaucratic howler: the planners gave responsibility for Krasnoyarsk (Eastern Siberia) to the Urals construction ministry, which they then set up in Chelyabinsk — a thousand miles away on the other side of the country.

Examples of half-baked reform not delivering the goods can be multiplied ad nauseam, and they illustrate why *Khozraschot* (that is, financial accountability) is now the last hope of *perestroika*. Recently toothpaste became "defitsitny". The planners had struck back after public complaints about quality by closing the only two toothpaste factories for "reconstruction". Limited supplies are in the shops again now — but they are imports with long-forgotten names like Kolynos and Pepsodent (evoking, like so much in everyday Soviet life, curious memories of post war Britain). *Khozraschot* is supposed to put right such paternalism, but the first fruits of exposing Soviet industry to the market looks like being the mother and father of an economic crisis. This year, for the first time since the 1920s, industrial production seems set to fall.

Dole queues

As a result, the Soviet government is striving to avoid the final indignity of dole queues appearing alongside all the other queues. Gorbachev's leadership will stand or fall on his ability to free the Soviet bureaucracy from the belief that socialism can be built in crisis-free conditions of endless economic growth. Unemployment, deflationary contraction and inflation (the inevitable result of any serious price reform) may well hit the Soviet economy together. The country is caught between a rock and a hard place. The underlying crisis of the system which 70 years of "socialist construction" has created is so profound that any meaningful solution is bound to entail drastic consequences.

But the alternatives are far worse. To do nothing would be to doom the Soviet Union to a spiral of relative and eventually, absolute decline. This wouldn't simply marginalise the country in the world economy, but could prejudice the political and even the territorial integrity of this vast state, with unforeseeable consequences for the whole world.

The Soviet economy is run by a bureaucratic octopus. Its head is in Moscow, its tentacles extend into every one of the hundreds of thousands of enterprises and collective farms which constitute the Soviet economy. Planning has made careers for 18 million bureaucrats, at least half of whom are theoretically redundant even before any reform takes hold. The dozens of ministries and sub-ministries which control every aspect of the economy are beyond meaningful control, but that does not mean they are the objects of universal hatred — on the contrary. One of the dangers which Gorbachev faces is the emergence of a vast social alliance between workers, managers and government bureaucrats.

This alliance has no alternative programme, but could hold the rest of society in inertia. If the first results of *Khozraschot* are to be closures of individual factories and workplaces, followed by mass redundancies, then it is to the ministries that plant managers and workforces will turn. Self-financing in the market is now a legal obligation on 60 per cent of enterprises. But it is as though *Khozraschot* is only a dream and the reality is the continued existence of the existing system. Much of current media discussion about *Khozraschot* takes the form of propaganda for change (as if the changes themselves had still to be made). People are holding their breath, waiting to see what happens, waiting most of all for the 19th party conference next month, which is increasingly billed as a shoot-out at which the vast entrenched forces of the Stalinist dinosaur will make their last stand.

Ominous signs of impending crisis appeared last year when output figures were depressed by active quality control. But poor quality is only a symptom of the real malaise. For decades successive governments saw absolute economic growth as the first, often the only, priority of economic policy. Development for its own sake set in. The economic Behemoth which resulted is now literally out of the control of its own creators. Soviet economists have coined a word for it: the "Samoyed" economy which, having consumed all around it, is now cannibalising itself in its efforts to grow even larger.

Growth during stagnation

The Samoyed economy enjoyed its best period during the years of so-called stagnation. That was when the basic and extractive industries achieved their most spectacular growth. The figures are truly staggering. Take energy production, for example: in 1984, the Soviet output of electricity gas, oil, coal and other fuels was 1,000 million tonnes of coal-equivalent more than in 1970 — a huge increase (equal to the whole Soviet energy production in 1965). In those 14 years more energy was produced than in the previous history of Russia. Yet for most ordinary people, this really was a period of stagnation, during which real incomes rose only very slowly.

The command economy's predilection for heavy industry has meant, as economist Vasilii Selyunin pointed out recently in the *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*, that the proportion of GNP shared by consumption goods went down and down over the decades. In 1928, just before the first five-year plan, 60 per cent of industrial production was of consumer goods. In 1985, only a quarter of GNP

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With only 12 building workers available for each project, the Soviet government comes to the obvious conclusion

Camera Press

went to consumption. At the same time, the proportion of incomes saved rose to an astonishing 40 per cent — higher even than during the war. But as growth visibly slowed to a standstill, the constant refrain of economists and planners was for a further tightening of belts, more savings, and still more emphasis on heavy industry.

The Samoyed economy which emerged from this sacrifice proved more wasteful of labour and natural resources than any other economy on earth. The Brezhnev era achieved expansion by treating natural resources as though they were inexhaustable, and the environmental damage and wastefulness of this policy are only now being acknowledged. In the *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* article, Vasilii Selyunin observed that "we are approaching the last boundary beyond which high growth tempos, under existing economic structures, are simply unsustainable." The planned economy has degenerated into "an economics of dissipation".

The Soviet economy today is a curious mix of labour surpluses and shortages, unfinished new projects and old unmodernised enterprises. Examples of its incoherence are legion. The average Soviet combine harvester has only a six-month continuous service life. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet tractors fall out of commission for want of spares and trained mechanics. The bureaucratic response was a plan for a huge new tractor plant. Stroibank, the state construction bank, reported recently that billions of roubles are lost because there aren't enough skilled workers to install new equipment in other plants. In some years the growth in GNP is less than the value of hoarded raw materials and unused machinery.

Economists argue that more production under such conditions actually means more waste of fuel and raw materials. But this gloomy view doesn't tell the full story. For even if Soviet planners could extract an unprecedented five per cent annual growth rate, living standards would not rise — such are the pressures of a growing *and* ageing population and the obsolescent economy. The only way out is to abandon the command economy, reduce the level of savings, stop expanding heavy industry and encourage consumption.

> *Examples of half-baked reform not delivering the goods can be multiplied ad nauseam, and they illustrate why Khozraschot is the last hope of* perestroika. . . *but the first fruits of exposing Soviet industry to the market may be the mother and father of an economic crisis*

This means thoroughgoing reform to bring prices into line with world market levels and remove the concealed subsidies to heavy industry and agriculture which so distort Soviet statistics. Once again, this entails a frontal assault on an entrenched bureaucracy. But there is no other way to reduce the level of savings and create real spending power. The extraordinary volume of savings — equivalent to the population's annual personal income — represents the only real reserve left to the Soviet economy. For now, it also represents an enormous constraint on increasing productivity. There is simply no incentive for work collectives to sack members and re-divide their work and pay if they don't need the extra cash.

No one really knows what will happen when the effects of *Khozraschot* really begin to be felt so the response remains uncertain. But most people realise that the old ways couldn't continue, even if they suffer under the new.

There is one crucial respect in which *perestroika* differs from industrial restructuring in the west. *Khozraschot* depends on reducing defence spending and raising living standards, not the phoney rhetoric of cold war, crushing debt burdens on the third world and an arms race. Indeed, Gorbachev really looks towards an opportunity to begin reductions in the most expensive arms of all — conventional ones. In this respect at least (perhaps the most crucial one), *Khozraschot* will be unlike any economic crisis the capitalist world has ever known.

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Malaysia: a crackdown on democracy

Malaysia's ruling party has cracked down on dissident voices in, it argues, the interests of racial harmony.
WILLIAM PINWILL *disagrees*

ONE OF THE placards at a mass rally in Kuala Lumpur depicted a kris, a Malay sword, with the words, "Soak it in Chinese blood". Another declared, "May 13 has begun". The slogans were a frightening reminder to onlookers of 13 May 1969, when race riots led to an orgy of killing and arson, with an official death toll of 248 Chinese, Malays and Indians.

Last October's rally was organised by the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant party in the ruling multi-racial coalition. An even bigger UMNO event was planned for 1 November, ostensibly to celebrate the party's 41st anniversary (although there was no 40th birthday rally last year, and UMNO was founded in May 1946). Special trains were to bring thousands of Malays from the east coast. Organisers predicted a turnout of half a million. Moderate Malays were alarmed; many Chinese were terrified.

When a Malay soldier rank amok with a M16 rifle in a Chinese quarter of the capital the day after the youth rally, fear turned to panic in the Chinese community.

Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is both Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, moved decisively and comprehensively to defuse the situation. In less than a month, police arrested 119 activists including students, politicians, conservatives, Christians and a small number of Malay extremists.

They were all detained under the notorious internal Security Act, which permits indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial. Four newspapers also lost their licence to publish. It was the biggest crackdown on dissenters in the 30 years since independence and it stunned the country.

For the first time in 20 years of reporting Malaysia, I found last November that responsible and respectable citizens looked warily over their shoulders and dropped their voices when they dared to criticise the government.

Some eminent figures spoke out. The nation's senior statesman, Tunku Abdul Rahman, branded the Mahathir administration "a dictatorship and a police state". And recently, the chairman of the Malaysian Bar Council, Mr Param Cumaraswamy, publicly charged that the Prime Minister had "defaced and defiled the Constitution".

The International Commission of Jurists has now added its voice to the growing chorus of criticism. The Australian section of the ICJ, in a report issued last month, warned that the Malaysian government "is using the issue of national security as a scapegoat for allowing widespread infringements of fundamental liberties to occur".

"The clear implication is that the government is acting to shore up its own political interests and survival by resorting to authoritarianism and suppression of liberty," wrote the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Justice Marcus Einfield, in a foreword to the ICJ report.

Other protests have come from the European Parliament, human rights group and 39 members of the United States Congress.

Self-justifying white paper

The government's response to criticisms of last year's mass arrests came in the form of a White Paper tabled in the Kuala Lumpur parliament. *Towards Preserving National Security* offers a predictable grab-bag of excuses, none of which convinced critics who pointed to its internal contradictions, exaggerations and non sequiturs.

After declaring at the onset "The communist threat is now under control," the White Paper claims there is a Marxist group trained at universities in Britain, the United States and Malaysia who threaten internal security. Their method is "conscientisation", and the vehicle for their subversive activities is theatre.

These Thespian revolutionaries went so far as to encourage students "to visit squatter areas to expose them to poverty with the aim of arousing their anger towards the existing system." For these crimes against the state, they were locked in solitary confinement, subjected to psychological harassment, deprivation and disorientation.

Another subversive group, according to the White Paper, was based at the First Baptist Church in Petaling Jaya, near Kuala Lumpur. It had sought to break the law that forbids other religions from conducting missionary activities among Muslims. Its effectiveness can be gauged from the White Paper's admission that in the nearly four years of proselytising, the Baptists succeeded in converting seven Malay Muslims. There were also "Islamic deviationist groups" among the detainees, most linked to the opposition Party Islam (PAS), which poses a sporadic political threat to UMNO by espousing Muslim fundamentalism.

Most Malays believe that the crackdown was motivated by government's fear of growing tensions between the country's ethnic groups.

Racial rivalry

The 1969 riots spawned New Economic Policy, a programme of positive discrimination in favour of the Malay community. Its avowed aims were the restructuring of Malaysian society to correct the economic imbalance between the races, and the eradication of poverty irrespective of race. Its principal trust was to increase Malay ownership of the share capital of limited companies (about 1.5 per cent in 1970) to 30 per cent by 1990.

The "backwardness" of the Malays (who constitute just over half the population) is often attributed to racial characteristics. But there is compelling evidence that racial rivalry, envy and suspicion were among the blessings of colonialism.

Over the past 200 years, most British administrators have considered the Malays to be lazy and shiftless. Emphasising the feudal aspects of Malay culture, the British decreed that the position of the Malay sultans was sacrosanct, and British rule was exercised through the existing autocratic structure. Demands for democracy by Malays or other races were resisted, often by force.

The communal divisions between Malays and non-Malays also have their roots in British immigration and economic policies. By 1931 the Malays were a minority in their own country, outnumbered by the Chinese, brought in for tin mining, and the Indians, slaving in usually medieval conditions in the plantations.

For the Malays, opportunities outside traditional farming and fishing pursuits were minimal. By deliberate policy, the British and Malay rulers refused requests for English-language schools to be built in the Malay villages, fearing a mass exodus from rice farming. In the cities and main towns, the British encouraged the formation of a Chinese and Indian entrepreneural class.

Money politics rule

Racial stereotyping is perpetuated by modern Malay leaders, not least the present Prime Minister. In a controversial book published after the 1969 riots, Dr Mahathir wrote: "The Malays are spiritually inclined tolerant and easy-going. The non-Malays and generally the Chinese are materialistic, aggressive and have an appetite for work."

Critics argue that such descriptions conceal the real cause of Malay poverty. They point to the analysis of the first modern chronicler of Malay history, Munshi Abdullah, who, writing of the early 19th century, first evaluated the degradation of his fellow Malays.

He dismissed indolence as a major cause of poverty: the real cause was the rapaciousness of the Malay ruling class. Whenever the rural Malays acquired some land or increased their crop production, some covetous ruler would seize their possessions. They concluded there was little point in being industrious since they were prevented from enjoying the fruits of their toil.

One of the most articulate modern critics is Dr Chancra Muzaffar, a devout and moderate Muslim. He argues: "There is nothing ethnic or cultural about the backwardness of Malay society. The Chinese role in the economy is not responsible for Malay poverty. The really significant difference in incomes is within each community and within sectors and not between communities."

As for the latest crackdown, Chandra says the "ethnic argument" is being used to squash any chance of reform." The government should realise that the real culprit is the fellow who dirties the linen, not the chap who says the linen is dirty. If some of the malpractices and wrongdoings of the elite are about to be exposed, all that a Machiavellian politician has to do is to engineer an 'ethnic crisis' in order to keep his group in power."

The abuse of political and economic power lies at the root of many of Malaysia's current difficulties. With the rapid economic growth of the 1970s and early '80s, the government parties established their own holding companies, with interests in property, banking and finance, hotels, the media and industry. "Money politics" has infected Malaysia, and the country that was once noted as the least corrupt in capitalist Asia is now infected with graft and nepotism.

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ESSAY

Richesse oblige: the new Tory wave

From deep in the engine room of HMS Thatcherism **DAVID MARQUAND** *can hear the sounds of propellors being thrown into reverse*

AS THE THATCHERITE juggernaut rolls on, pulverising more and more of the intermediate institutions which lie between the atomistic individual and the looming state, some quite exalted travellers are showing signs of unease. Since the budget, Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Baker, former Heathite recusants whose conversions to the new faith always seemed spurious, have stirred fading memories of an older Toryism of communal ties and *noblesse oblige*.

"There is another side to the coin of economic individualism," Baker told the Bow Group. "That other side is social responsibility." Hurd went further. In these pages the other day, he insisted that social policy should be founded upon "ideals of active and responsible citizenship". On *Weekend World* he explained: "We've got to say to those people doing quite well, look, there's a community to which you also belong — be an active citizen within it'." Even Nigel Lawson and Mrs Thatcher have qualified their relentless celebration of the acquisitive instinct. The "well off", Lawson conceded on television, should "show a sense of social obligation". And, in her address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Mrs Thatcher declared that "a spiritual dimension comes in" when the wealthy have to decide what to do with their wealth.

No doubt, political expediency provides part of the explanation. The budget had a peculiarly shameless quality about it, shocking to many Tory voters, as well as to non-Tories. Having been caught robbing the poor box, ministers with good political antennae recognise that a spell of moral earnestness is now in order. Besides, Hurd and Baker both want to succeed to the leadership. Both know that they cannot do so as Thatcherites. If the Tory party wants another sea-green incorruptible from the radical right, it will turn to Norman Tebbit. The best bet for other challengers is a compromise — Thatcherite enough not to upset the loyalists; pre-Thatcherite enough to appeal to the growing number of Conservatives whose nerve-ends tell them that the revolution has gone far enough.

Yet I doubt if that is the whole story. Hurd was right in saying that, for most of the last 200 years, the Tory tradition has been much closer to Burke than to Hobbes. Conservatives have been suspicious of the central state and in favour of intermediate institutions; suspicious of unqualified individualism and in favour of balance between public and private power; suspicious, above all, of *a priori* theorising based on supposed laws of human behaviour, and in favour of a sceptical empiricism grounded in the particularities of British history. These strands in the Conservative Party's inheritance have made it the most successful right-wing party in the western world. They may have gone underground under Mrs Thatcher, but it is hard to believe that they have disappeared altogether.

After 1975, and still more after 1981, the Thatcherites hi-jacked the Conservative Party. But the passengers did not all abandon the mental habits of a lifetime. Though the wets lost the battle over economic policy, it does not follow that the dries won the battle for the soul of the party. The wets' defeat was circumstantial, not philosophical; particular, not general. They lost because they had no political alternative to the narrow certainties of the dries: because the economic assumptions which they shared with Labour moderates could longer be applied in a medium-sized nation state with an open market economy and a petrocurrency; and because they had no other assumptions to put in their place. But although they lost the battle over the economy, it was always likely that the tradition which they exemplified would return to the field, albeit in a new guise, when the argument moved away from economics and shifted to the "social question" instead.

> *"...Hurd and Baker both want to succeed to the leadership. Both know that they cannot do so as Thatcherites. If the Tory party wants another sea-green incorruptible from the radical right, it will turn to Norman Tebbit"*

For, if the traditional Tories lacked a workable economic policy, the Thatcherite radicals lack a tolerable social philosophy. This is not to say that they have no special philosophy at all: the key word in the last sentence is "tolerable". Hayekian market liberalism derives from a bleakly coherent vision of man and society. The trouble lies in the political implications of that vision. A Hayekian market order works through sticks as well as carrots; punishments as well as rewards. If the sticks do not hurt, and the punishments fail to bite, the disciplines of the market will lose their terror; society will once again start sliding down the slippery path of collectivism.

The market-liberal vision may or may not be compatible with democracy. Most of its early prophets thought it was not, and Hayek plainly agrees with them. What is clear is that it is incompatible with a welfare state. For the whole object of the modern welfare state, winners still get the carrots, but losers are shielded from the sticks. And, since the only way to shield the losers is to tax the winners, even the winners do not get as many carrots as a genuinely market order would have given them.

Permanent revolution?

Hence, the dilemmas to which Hurd and Baker have made their coded responses. So far, market liberalism has run with the grain of the Conservative Party. Attacks on the trade unions; privatisation; cuts in taxes and welfare benefits — there is nothing in any of these to upset the Tory two-fifths of the electorate or the Tory rank and file. The trouble is that they represent only part of the New Right project. If the rest of the project is to be carried out as well — if a true market order is to be resuscitated, and the legacy of nearly a century of creeping collectivism destroyed — the juggernaut will have to invade much more sensitive territory.

To clamber from the foothills of market liberalism to the peaks, the government would have to launch a much more determined attack on the welfare estate — and not just on the parts of it which benefit the poor, but on the middle-class welfare state of mortgage tax relief, subsidised higher education, subsidised motorway building and free provision of high-cost operations on the NHS. It would also have to attack the complex network of institutions and practices which still make a mockery of its free-market rhetoric — on the associations which control access to (and keep up earnings in) the professions, for example; on the planning laws which protect the environment of Tory southern England from spoliation; on the cosy symbiosis between defence contractors and the armed services. And to engineer the shift of attitude and value without which none of this would be possible, it would have to give even more power to an even more intrusive central state.

New Right market liberalism, in short, logically implies a capitalist equivalent of Trotsky's permanent revolution, imposed from above. Only the truest of true believers can contemplate such a prospect with equanimity. For the victims would not be confined to such familiar bogies as loutish trade-union leaders, loony-left councillors, long-haired polytechnic lecturers and shiftless Labour-voting products of the "dependency culture". They would include successful Tory barristers, well-heeled Tory farmers, retired Tory colonels and thrusting Tory yuppies. As some thoughtful Conservatives are beginning to realise, moreover, the armoury of powers which the central state must acquire if it is to uproot all the vestiges of the social-democratic consensus of the post-war

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period might one day be used by a government of a different colour, in the interests of a different cultural transformation.

Yet more consolidation is not a satisfactory alternative. The "social question" is real, not imaginary. The dereliction and despair of the decaying centres of the first industrial revolution; the almost palpable alienation of a growing underclass; the lengthening shadows of vandalism and crime — these were not invented by the Bishop of Durham or the Prince of Wales. Nor, of course, are they legacies of the present government alone: the social and cultural forces which lie behind them were at work well before Mrs Thatcher arrived on the doorstep of No 10 Downing Street. Their historical origins, however, are beside the point. The point is that they cannot be cured by standing pat.

What, then, is the government to do? One possible answer, of course, is to ignore the problem: to allow the gap between yuppifying Britain and sink-estate Britain to widen, and to leave the latter to stew in its own juice. But although that answer may appeal to the stupider of the members of the 1922 Committee, it carries heavy risks. The Conservative Party cannot be sure of winning another election with 42 per cent of the popular vote. Even if it could be, it cannot be sure of winning 42 per cent of the vote with an unqualified appeal to the short-term greed of its own constituents. Besides, political man cannot live by election victories alone. No great party can do without a social vision of some kind; and there is no place in the Conservative vision for an eternally divided nation, forever polarised between increasingly prosperous majority and an increasingly embittered minority.

Another possible answer is the New Right's. This has an inexorable, terrifying but intellectually coherent simiplicity about it. The revolution must be widened and deepened. The social and political barriers which keep market forces out of the inner cities must be trampled down. The clinging remnants of the social-democratic consensus, which on market-liberal assumptions provide the true explanation for their deprivation, must be hacked away. In this fashion, and only in this fashion, they will be assimilated into the burgeoning, wealth-creating, growth-inducing enterprise culture of the rest of the country, and the wilderness of collectivism will be made to blossom like the free-market rose.

That answer is simplistic at best, and nonsensical at worst. The assumptions on which it rests fly in the face of 200 years of economic history. What is more to the point, it — or, at any rate, the ideology from which it springs — threatens to upset the delicate balance between hierarchical Tory traditionalism and individualistic economic liberalism on which the present-day Conservative Party depends. But it is, at least, an answer. Consolidation is not. However tentatively and uncertainly, Hurd and Baker seem to have realised this. Albeit in a rather gingerly fashion, they are groping for a positive, rather than a negative, alternative to the New Right's stark prospectus; for a new version of traditional Toryism which offers a more promising answer to the "social question" than doing nothing.

It is easy to spot weaknesses in their alternative. Their new Tory communitarianism has a strong whiff of the Lady Bountiful about it. Their responsible citizens sound suspiciously like paternalistic local businessmen, and their communities like extensions of the Rotary Club. It does not seem to have occurred to them that the unions as well as the employers may have a responsibility to the community, or that the victims of government policy might help to run their communities as well as the beneficiaries. Though they use the language of citizenship, they seem deaf to the notions of popular participation and equal rights without which that language is empty rhetoric. They are not merely deaf, but hostile, to its distributional implications. The old socialist cry, "damn your charity, we want justice", means nothing to them. They do not see that a community cannot be fashioned out of a series of altruistic spasms: that a sense of community depends upon a sense that the burdens and proceeds of community action are fairly shared.

> *Despite the conventional wisdom that the Thatcherite revolution is irreversible and irresistible, the juggernaut is unlikely to roll on forever. The market-liberal ideology which legitimises it rests on a distorted view of human nature and human possibilities*

Yet it would be a mistake to write them off. Despite the conventional wisdom that the Thatcher revolution is irreversible and irresistible, the juggernaut is unlikely to roll on forever. The market-liberal ideology which legitimises it rests on a distorted, two-dimensional view of human nature and human possibilities. Real people, in real societies, do not behave in the way that view implies, and no amount of social engineering can make them do so. The New Right version of a Britain re-made in the image of Dicken's Mr Gradgrind is as perverse an impossibility as the Stalinist vision of re-made Soviet Man. Sooner or later, the attempt to realise it will be abandoned — not, it is true, before it has done terrible damage to the economy and society. When that time comes, what we might perhaps call Hurd-Bakerism is likely to be the wave of the Conservatives' future.

The question for the democratic left is how to respond to that prospect. Two answers stand out, one negative and the other positive. It should be clear by now that a defensive sub-Thatcherism, more or less reminiscent of David Owen's Social Market, would be politically inopportune as well as intellectually disreputable. It is just conceivable that, in the post-Thatcher era which must dawn sooner or later, Owen himself might emerge as the last white hope of market liberalism *pur et dur*. That option is not available to Roy Hattersley, Bryan Gould or Neil Kinnock — or, for that matter, to Paddy Ashdown or Alan Beith. The political traditions which they represent were all born out of a revolt against the consequences of market liberalism, and if they try to repudiate that inheritance they will only make themselves look ridiculous.

In any case, no purpose would be served by repudiating it. At its heart lie the simple propositions that the market was made for man, not man for the market, and that private greed alone cannot secure the public good. As Hurd and Baker have both spotted, the Thatcher experiment has demonstrated the truth of these propositions anew. Largely because of this, the twelve months since the last election have already begun to disprove the historicist assumption that, because market liberalism was the fashion of the eighties, it will also be the fashion of the nineties. It would be the height of absurdity to embark upon a tortured and unconvincing attempt to redefine social liberalism, social democracy or democratic socialism in its categories at the very moment when its contradictions are becoming apparent.

Rights go with duties

This leads on to the positive answer. The language of responsibility, citizenship and community ought to be the language of the left, but for too much of this century the big battalions of the left have not known how to speak it. Not the least of the reasons why the radical right found it so easy to seize the political initiative was that the centre and left had lost sight of the simple truism that rights go with duties. Not the least of the reasons why it found it so easy to exploit its advantages thereafter was that the institutions which stood in its way had lost touch with those they were supposed to serve. The trade unions, local councils, universities, the BBC, nationalised industries — when it came to the point, the great corporations of the social-democratic consensus turned out to have no troops.

The reasons are extraordinarily complex, but one of them stands ahead of all the others. The social-democratic consensus had become centralist, mechanistic and manipulative. The bottom-up popular radicalism of the nineteenth century — provincial, nonconformist, anti-establishment and suspicious of concentrations of power — had been absorbed or overwhelmed by a coalition of top-down Fabian collectivists and top-down trade-union collective bargainers. That coalition, in turn, was absorbed or overwhelmed by the mandarin culture of the English south-east. In practice, social-democratic Britain was managed from London by a Benthamite technocracy, disinterestedly committed to the public good, but deeply suspicious of any suggestion that the public themselves should help to decide what, in detail, that good should be. When the crisis came in the seventies, Mrs Thatcher found it easier to strike the chords of the old, popular radicalism than did the heirs of the radicals themselves.

The moral is plain. The answer to the paternalistic, *richesse oblige* communitarianism of Hurd and Baker lies in a return to that older radicalism; the answer to their attempt to renew the legacy of Edmund Burke in an attempt to renew the legacy of Thomas Paine. Around such an attempt, all the scattered forces of the democratic left should now coalesce. □

Professor David Marquand was Labour MP for Ashfield 1966 to 1977, a member of the SDP National Committee and is now on the Policy Committee of the new Social and Liberal Democrats.

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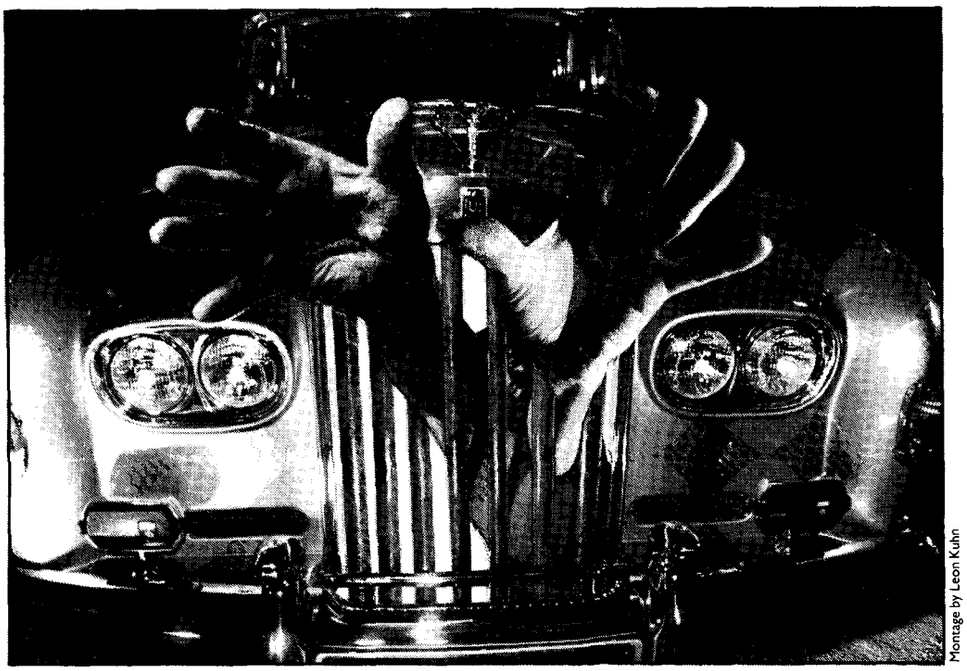

Montage by Leon Kuhn

What is a washing machine?

Depite its elusiveness and occasional obscurity,* JEAN BAUDRILLARD's *philosophy, argues* SIMON FRITH, *is of major importance to our age of greed, consumption and panic about cultural production

A MONTH OR SO AGO I went to a grand conference on television organised by the Centre for Twentieth Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The proceedings opened with a postmodern flourish. We were overwhelmed with images of catastrophe and fatality: the Challenger blowing up; John Kennedy's assassination reconstructed as an aesthetically familiar, repeatedly satisfying video clip. We watched skin pulled into shape by plastic surgeons, bodies pummelled not to counterfeit youth but to simulate its existence.

When the students pinned up their wall chart that evening — the top ten Gurus of the Day — Jean Baudrillard easily headed the list. In contemporary academic discourse, itself organised around the relentless deployment of quotation, Baudrillard has long been the most summoned spectre.

For a dilettante intellectual like me, Baudrillard's arguments have so far seeped through serendipitously. An article translated here, an assertion expounded there, the general sense of a deliberately hyperbolic thinker whose ideas seduce without satisfying: Baudrillard, more than any other philosophy star, is defined by the commodity system he himself describes, his *apercus* circulating as analytic signs rather than meeting analytic needs, an important but elusive figure, read for the manner rather than the substance of his thought but admirable as the first person to articulate theoratically the gut feeling that mass culture is not a subject for despair (or celebration) but simply describes the world in which we live. Politics (and this is a point that has had particular resonance for radical artists) is no longer a matter of utopianism or negation, but has now to be restricted to a fatal *irony*.

Mark Poster's orderly selection of Baudrillard's writings, shortly to be published by Polity*, doesn't contradict this reading but does help place it — and despite my reservations about such textual sampling, I recommend his volume highly for when it reaches the bookshops. In an intelligent mix of book extracts and articles, previously translated and untranslated work, Poster offers a history of Baudrillard's thought and brings to light two aspects of it which help explain his impact, particularly in the USA. First, it is fascinating to realise how much of Baudrillard's understanding of consumer society comes not from European theory but from American social science; second, it becomes clear that Baudrillard's own mode of thought is a ruthless rationalism, the pursuit of every consequence of his starting premise that classic Marxist thought can't make sense of consumption. If his later work is unconvincing, it is not because he is illogical but because (unlike Roland Barthes) he is rather unimaginative.

In his first writings — *System of Objects*, 1968 and *Consumer Society*, 1970 — Baudrillard's understanding of post-war capitalism is clearly taken from late 1950s American left liberals like J.K. Galbraith. He shares their penchant for pseudo-empiricism; he reads adman's copy as documentary evidence; his deliberate exaggeration of consumer trends is reminiscent of sf writers like Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth. But if at times this makes one want to shout out the British Marxist response to the *embourgeoisement* thesis — "a washing machine is a washing machine is a washing machine" — there's also no doubt that Baudrillard is a much more determined thinker than the socio-psycho babblers from whom he takes his lead.

What begins as a methodological point — "a washing machine *serves* as equipment and *plays* as an element of conformity, or of prestige, etc. It is the field of play that is specifically the field of consumption." — thus becomes Baudrillard's intellectual project: to understand this field of play both in its own terms and according to its human consequences. If consumption is not just the satisfaction of needs, not just a material practice, if it involves the manipulation of the object-as-sign and is thus a discourse, then what is necessary to analyse it is a critique of materialism and a theory of signs.

Baudrillard provides both in his most important book, 1972's *Towards a Critique of a Political Economy of Signs*. This remains necessary reading, if only for its assault on the concept of real (versus false) needs and the subsequent application of the critique to the concept of use value. Baudrillard argues convincingly that human needs are not biological or anthropological givens but define the relationship between person and object set up by the commodity system itself. The point is not simply that each market object produces its own subject (as Marx argued), but that the capitalist system of objects produces a *system* of subjects. That system (stoked by desire disguised as need) can only be understood in terms of signification.

If the exchange of goods depends on their symbolic not their material use, then the shared form of exchange matters more than any differences of content. Marx got things the wrong way round when he suggested that human need invests goods with the use value on which the successful realisation of exchange value depends. Rather, commodity production makes necessary social exchanges which work by defining us as "needing" subjects. Use value is thus the *ideological* guarantee of exchange value and Baudrillard goes on to apply the same argument to the central use value in Marxist theory, labour power itself. By placing labour at the centre of its critique:

> Marxism assists the cunning of capital. It convinces men that they are alienated by the sale of their labour power, thus censoring the much more radical hypothesis that they might be alienated *as* labour power . . .

For Baudrillard the era of political economy (of which Marxism was an effect) is over. We are now in the era of symbolic economy and so his work since 1972 has meant theorising the experience of symbolic exchange, first through a critique of structural linguistics and then through what we might call a metaphorics, an attempt to get at the contemporary meaning of the market through

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metaphors for it: seduction, simulation, death. The philosophical (and literary) problem is how to describe events which are exactly what they seem to be, to record conversations in which there are not referents, to assess deals in which nothing changes hands. The basic categories of meaning (truth and reality) can't indicate anything outside this sign system; they are the (hysterical) effects of it.

I find much of Baudrillard's recent work difficult to follow (it leans too heavily on the multiple meanings of words that don't translate) but he remains an important thinker for two reasons. First, the questions he asked from the start about consumption are now at the heart of British political debates — and I'm not just referring to designer socialism here. The problem of consumption faces Thatcherites too. How to police desire? How to make greed responsible? Second, however wilfully sweeping or shallowly provoking are Baudrillard's ideas, they do confront the difficulty of cultural *production* (which explains why he has had such an impact on the art world — the questions he asks are theirs: what oppositional strategy is left when *everything* is symbolically equivalent?). Compare the soggy thought of Britain's cultural establishment, the feeble collusion of style sheets like *The Face*, the merger sacrifice of the *New Statesman's* back pages, and it is hard not to abandon fatalistic irony for more straightforward dismay. □

*"*Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings", ed. Mark Poster, will be published by Polity at £27.50 & £8.95 in July.*

The hijack fails

Gwyneth Jones

The Sykaos Papers
E.P. THOMPSON *Bloomsbury* £13.95

THE PURPOSES OF satire and science fiction are closely linked: it would be hard to find any sf completely innocent of a secret agenda. It must seem churlish then when genre writers grumble and sneer at those writers from the wider stage of politics or philosophy who hijack sf for their own high purposes. But however apologetically, I have to maintain that E.P. Thompson's *The Sykaos Papers* is yet another example of a failed expedition; a doomed project that founders in misapprehension and amateurish over-confidence.

An alien poet arrives on earth, crashing his reconnaissance shuttle beside an English motorway. His name is Oi Pas, from the planet Oitar. The reader who deciphers this simple code will soon learn that we are being inspected by Wisdom, whose home is Reason. There are no surprises in the treatment this wandering innocent receives in his whimsical and trenchant judgements on our "Sykotic" ways, nor in his fate when the Powers That Be are eventually convinced that they are dealing with a genuine alien. The greater part of the book concerns Oipas' prolonged debriefing in the kind of establishment (set up in a very English stately home and grounds) familiar to all admirers of '60s TV fantasy. Meanwhile, outside the protective and imprisoning walls of this demi-eden, NATO and the Warsaw pact deal with the shocking reality of approaching alien invasion. There are no surprises here either, and the end of the story (aside from a coda which is really too embarrassing to mention) is predictable.

In genre terms, *The Sykaos Papers* is an astonishing farrago of atrociously corny ideas, from the dyspeptic word processor, which apparently vomited this ominous text into Thompson's lap "by timewarp", to the hints at former visitations from certain legendary Oitarans known as Droo Id (the designer of Stonehenge), Kris Na and Bod Ha. This is not, one realises, intended to be interesting or original sf. However, it must be intended to be effective propaganda (and I use the term in no derogatory sense) — but it is here that *Sykaos* goes desperately wrong. We learn that in the face of utter disaster the heavy dancers will not make peace, nor sense. They will see us all dead and damned before they give up their hideous posturing. All very well, though hardly a new insight, but the problem is that Reason reversed is no benign Utopia. "Oitar" is a machine-society run by computers; a culture with no equivalent terms for "love", "mercy", "compassion". Moreover the world of these programmed beings is dying: they have not come in peace, they are looking for *lebensraum*. And, in spite of some later fudging, it is quite clear that when the Oitarians move in, the earth will be about as healthy for earthlings as present day Australia is for native Australians. The net result, then, is that Thompson finds himself telling us that the paranoia merchants are right. The Other *is* deadly dangerous.

How did E.P. Thompson, tireless campaigner for a positive future and a habitable planet, get himself into this illogical bind? It is extraordinary in the work of a peace activist to find that the only mention of grass-roots political action (in this appalling situation) is a brief contemptuous dismissal of some ill-informed "Greenham Women". Otherwise the people are silent. We, the readers, are given no alternative but to identify ourselves with those "in the know", the officer corps, and to join the writer in hopeless mourning for the beloved England of horses and cats, roses and lilies, loyal servants, gracious ladies and decent, intelligent, blue-eyed army officers.

Is this an insider's bitter and despairing dismissal of the peace movement, and, by inference, the human race? I think not, for there is after all that unmentionable coda and he treats his "last days" characters — sentimental puppets though they are — with real affection. *The Sykaos Papers* is a daydream, which would never have strayed into print in any serious guise. What we have here is the nostalgia of a generation which because it has no other youth cannot do other than dream of the cameraderie, the courage, the clarity of total war and, above all, the emotional luxury of a unifying enemy. I suspect that E.P. Thompson is well aware of this effect. I suspect he feels that he paid for the self-indulgence by giving his tale a down-beat ending and that the ensuing bad logic doesn't matter because this is "only science fiction". But it does matter. The future has no existence but in our imaginations and therefore imaginary surrender is uncomfortably close to the real-life kind. □

The passion to know

Harriett Gilbert

The Art of the Novel
MILAN KUNDERA trans. LINDA ASHER and DAVID BELLOS *Faber* £9.95

"GREAT NOVELS," writes Milan Kundera, "are always a little more intelligent than their authors." The sentence contains almost everything that is splendid and ghastly about *The Art of the Novel*.

To deal with the ghastliness first. The section in which that sentence appears, the seventh and last of the book, was originally written as a speech of acceptance when, in 1985, Kundera was presented with the Jerusalem Prize for his fiction. But throughout the book — whether in those sections which started as a "dialogue" in the *Paris Review* or in those essays previously published in the *New York Times Book Review, Granta, Le Nouvel Observateur* — there's the same impression that Kundera is lecturing us from a podium.

Just as he waves aside possible queries about the concept "great novel", just as he pronounces "always" in tones of omniscience, so elsewhere, when responding to an earnest enquiry about the psychological novel, he waggles one pedagogic finger and says: "The term is, of course, inexact and approximate. Let's avoid it and use a periphrasis: Richardson set the novel on its way to the exploration of man's interior life." Even in an essay on the Austrian Hermann Broch, whom he greatly admires, he can't avoid sounding so patronising, so pompous that you want to scream.

To admirers of Kundera's perfectly balanced, precise and bitter-sweet fiction, the tone of these interlinked essays is a shock. To people who care about the novel as a form, it is also a profound frustration — for it keeps obscuring what could very well be the most passionate, splendid and visionary defence of "Cervantes' legacy" ever to be written.

In essence, what Kundera argues is this: if it is true, as Husserl sadly decided in 1935, that the 17th century saw European science and philosophy drop their "passion to know" in favour of merely "technical and mathematical investigation", it also saw Cervantes, with *Don Quixote*, gather that passion up. The novel, in other words, is more than entertainment: it both began as and continues to be *a necessary form of enquiry*, with rules of conduct specific to itself and inherent powers to illuminate corners where other disciplines flicker and gutter:

> The novel dealt with the unconscious before Freud, the class struggle before Marx, it practiced phenomenology (the investigation of the essence of human situations) before the phenomenologists. What superb "phenomenological descriptions" in Proust, who never even knew a phenomenologist!

Is this excessive? I think not. Kundera possibly stretches the point when he states, in that terrible schoolmaster's voice, that "Flaubert's discovery [of human stupidity] is more important for the future of the world than the most startling ideas of Marx or Freud". But it's nonetheless true that most Europeans now acquire their understanding

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of the world through fiction, not science or philosophy (which makes even weirder the conviction to which so many men, in particular, cling: that novels are intrinsically less "important" than any work of non-fiction).

Kundera's defence of the novel is more than ocean-thundering rhetoric. On page after page, he strikes sparks of insight from the rock of a solid idea: that the novel hasn't exhausted itself, since there are any number of routes (Sterne's, Kafka's, Musil's, Proust's) which it's scarcely begun to explore; that an over-long novel (*The Man Without Qualities*) cannot be really effective because the reader, on reaching the end, must be able to remember the beginning; that Kafka, far from being prophetic, was translating into the language of society his personal experience of family. . .

The Art of the Novel is too chock-a-block to précis — not least because of its understanding of what European literature is. Kundera may be a Czech now living in France, but his frame of reference stretches from Henry Fielding to Agatha Christie (though it should be said that the latter is the *only* woman he mentions), from Joyce to Leonardo Sciascia.

In the section entitled "Sixty-three Words" Kundera says, under "Interview": "Cursed be the writer who first allowed a journalist to reproduce his remarks freely! . . .Yet I do very much like the *dialogue* (a major literary form), and I've been pleased with several such discussions that were mutually pondered, composed, and edited." He has grounds for his suspicion of mass culture: the early translation of his novel *The Joke*, done without his permission, simplified and rearranged it out of recognition. But one can't help feeling that all that pondering and editing — however vital to the delicate precision of his fiction — has here half-suffocated some vital ideas.

Rotting the brain

Sara Maitland

Tolstoy
A.N. WILSON *Hamish Hamilton* £16.95

I INCREASINGLY BELIEVE that biographies tell as much about their authors as their subjects. How do biographers pick their victims?

This is here no idle speculation. Why on earth should A.N. Wilson *want* to write a biography of Tolstoy? Sure, he admires *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* as well. But Tolstoy lived for 40 years before the publication of *War and Peace* and for 35 years after the publication of *Anna Karenina* and for almost all of this time Wilson finds Tolstoy silly. In particular he finds Tolstoy's active radicalism and mysticism from 1880 an idiotic waste of time. Why didn't he, Wilson asks in various tones from the outraged to the peevish, write some more novels? Wilson searches valiantly and sensitively for answers, but it seems to me to be the wrong question. Anyway it is very odd to commit yourself to over 500 obviously conscientiously researched pages on someone whom you think is a misguided nit-wit.

There are two answers I think. Wilson's forte in fiction is bringing together the tragically idealistic individual and the farce and crassness of "real life". In the resulting mayhem, Wilson's superior detachment shines above both the shallowness of idealism and tomfoolery of history. Tolstoy responds rather well to this treatment — by which I mean you can make a coherent narrative out of his life and times if you follow this line. The contrast between the beneficent and nobly aspiring mystical pacifist and the completely lunatic misery and violence of his domestic life is the stuff of reactionary satire. As Wilson is good at this he pulls off a number of elegant moments:

> It was a summer of vivid dreams. Perhaps his brother Nikolay's [terminal] illness affected him more profoundly at a subconscious level than he at first recognised. Or perhaps, merely, the German food disagreed with his repose.

Reducing the greatest of the masters, especially if you devotedly insist on his mastery, to the level of one of your own creations is, I would imagine, immensely ego gratifying.

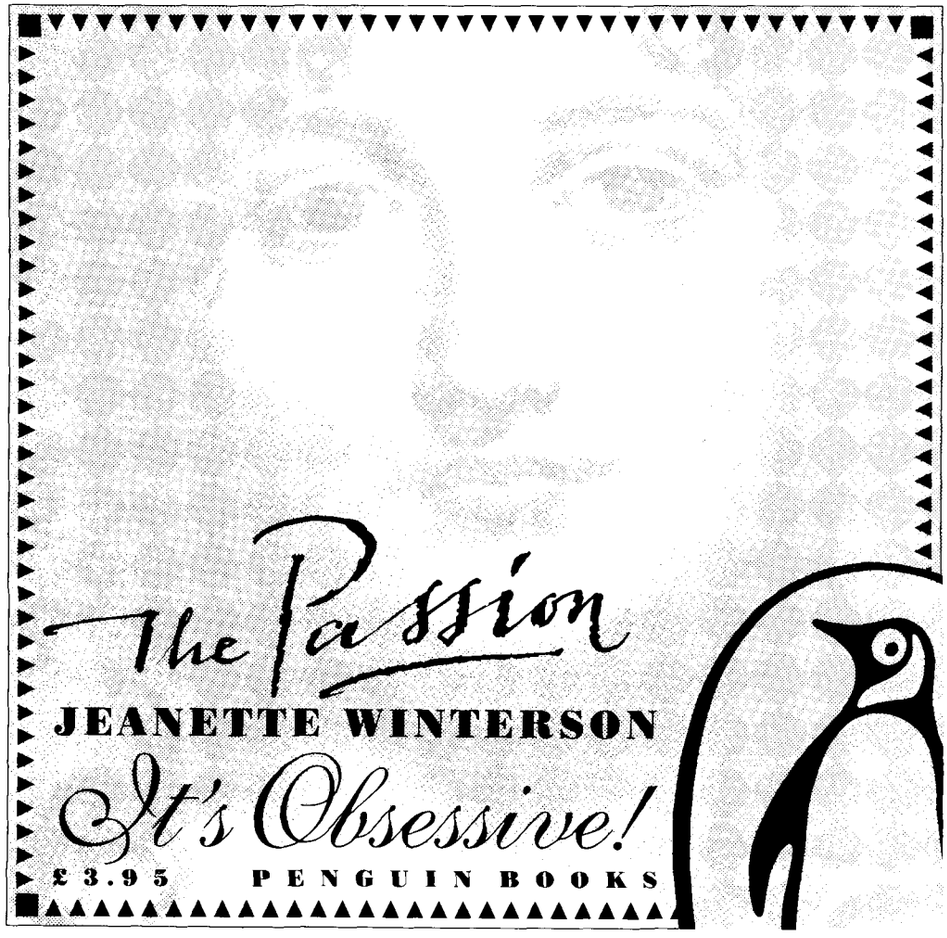
The other attraction of Tolstoy for Wilson is political. Tolstoy, Wilson tells us, stopped writing great novels and started espousing idiotic positions as he became increasingly concerned with left-wing political solutions. This is because political activism rots the brain: trying to find solutions to injustice is totally useless (change is always for the worse) and also distracts writers from their proper task. Tolstoy is silly because a) he was a radical and b) he thought it was possible to be socially virtuous, whereas all socialists are essentially evil. Demonstrating this key point is the only imaginable relevance in a biography of Tolstoy of such facts as that Lenin did *not* work on famine relief in 1873.

But Wilson's main aim is to expose Tolstoy's weaknesses in order to make anyone who might find Tolstoy's quite creative interpretation of anarchism thought-provoking — as Gandhi for instance did — feel foolish. The book is riddled with petty sneers:

> Female readers who have followed the argument about the purpose of a man's body (to work) will perhaps be wondering what is the purpose of a female body in the scheme of things.

Of course, as a male writer he has wondered, or he wouldn't have told us about this at all, but his interest is only to put down both feminists who have foolishly looked at Tolstoy's communal pacifism with interest and Tolstoy himself for muddleheadedness. "Hee hee hee, the master has feet of clay so yah boo sucks to the lefties" is the tone of large sections of the book. And this overview leads not only to a rather infantile closure to Tolstoy's flawed but brave ideas about class mobility, property relations and the role of religious institutions — to name but a few — but also to an extraordinary and frequent vulgarity of style (you really cannot refer to prostitutes as "tarts" in serious writing) and about the latter at least Wilson ought to know better.

The book, in short, is not a lot of help for anyone who wishes to engage with the complex history of Russian 19th century radicalism, or with the vast and complex personality of Tolstoy.



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Are you there, mother?

Lynda Birke

The Presence of the Past
RUPERT SHELDRAKE *Collins* £15

"WHY HAS NOT MAN a microscopic eye?" asked Pope in the *Essay on Man*: "For this plain reason, man is not a fly". It is not a reason that would satisfy many 20th century biologists. Yet whatever the answer, the question remains a central one: how, and why, do we become as we are?

The conventions of biology offer explanations in terms of genes and their selection through evolution. We do not possess fly genes; so, we are not flies. Genes are the determinants not only of shape, but, according to some sociobiologists, of our behaviour too. Sheldrake's starting point for his (now notorious) hypothesis of formative causation is that this pat answer is not enough. With that few biologists would disagree: the question of the origin of biological form has never adequately been explained by recourse to genetics and remains a thorny problem for biology to solve.

The Presence of the Past extends Sheldrake's hypothesis that biological form emerges as a result of influences across space and time from other similar organisms — an influence he terms "morphic resonance". Flies become flies because their development is influenced by that of other flies across the world; genes become secondary, affecting only the "tuning" of the organism to that nebulous influence. The title of this book refers to effects over time; it is not "laws of Nature" that govern our world, but *habits*. Memory, suggests Sheldrake, is inherent in Nature, and all natural things develop their shape according to a kind of collective memory from others of their kind.

I admit to being a scientist, and I presume that — according to the hypothesis — I am accordingly "tuned in" to orthodox theories of natural laws. Perhaps that is one reason why I cannot be convinced that morphic resonance exists: the problem for sceptics is that there is no empirical evidence for it. But I do share some of Sheldrake's misgivings about scientific orthodoxy. Biologists are familiar with the idea of "fields" of influence, rather like magnetic fields. We use them to explain, for instance, how growing nerve cells in embryos unerringly find their way to specific points some distance away. But what we don't know is how or why those "fields" develop: if a nerve cell can so accurately find its way to where it is "supposed" to be, how does it do so?

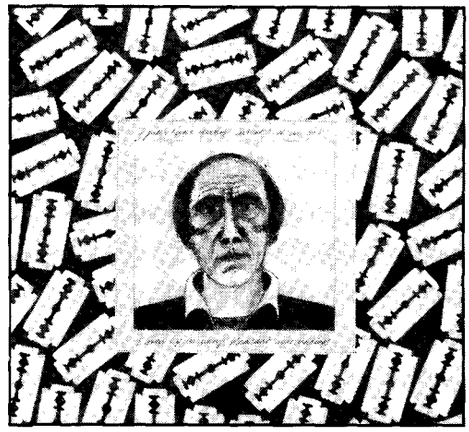
Sheldrake is quite right in emphasising that explanations in terms of inherited genes just won't do. The complex ways in which tissues move and change during the development of an embryo — having the same set of genes throughout — cannot simply be reduced to those genes. Mechanistic approaches try, as Sheldrake points out, "to explain everything and therefore nothing". Yet that is precisely the problem with Sheldrake's own theory: indeed, Sheldrake's ambition is wider. Where sociobiology threatens to cannibalise the social sciences, morphic resonance can explain everything in the social *and* natural worlds.

Or so we are told. Sheldrake provides no evidence, no convincing experimental tests of his hypothesis. What he does do is to consider a wide range of phenomena and assimilate them to his theory. This might be convincing if he adequately considered other explanations, to show that his worked better, but he does not. He criticises, for example, mechanistic theories of animal learning which cannot explain why rats learn mazes faster over generations. To Sheldrake, this occurs because each generation of rats is affected by morphic resonance from earlier generations.

It is here that one of my greatest concerns lies. He assumes that, if the apparatus is the same, all that can influence generations of rats to improve their learning ability in mazes is morphic resonance. I rather suspect, though, that the better learning of later rats has more to do with how individuals engage with their changing environment, and what is expected of them.

Sheldrake describes morphic resonance as offering a stabilising influence on, for example, societies. So, children can learn the specificities of their language or culture through morphic resonance. "Social roles are shaped by morphic fields stabilized by morphic resonance with those who have played these roles before". Yet if these resonances are always there, we are presumably all subject to their influence. What is it, then, that makes bosses peculiarly susceptible to past influences from *bosses'* morphic fields. Or workers? Or mothers? In discussing human social organisation, Sheldrake avoids the issue. He also claims that ". . . collectivist ideologies such as those of socialism and individualist ideologies such as those of the New Right differ only in degree. All are fundamantally collectivist." And all, of course, are organised by morphic fields.

You may care to speculate on the political implications of the hypothesis. Pessimists can bemoan the effect on society of morphic resonance from scores of individualistic yuppies extolling the virtus of Poll Tax; others might like to wonder whether the spirit of Wat Tyler persists in the ether. Armchair speculations aside, there is one thing about morphic resonance. If it works, you won't need to buy the book. Once enough reviewers have read it, you too can tune in.



One of Channel 4's more quirky and inspired pieces of commissioning was the series, *Ian Breakwell's Diary* (published in book form by Serpent's Tail), which brought this painter, photographer, collagist, writer, and video- and film-maker to a new and wider audience. THE ARTIST'S DREAM: STORIES AND PICTURES BY IAN BREAKWELL (Serpent's Tail, £6.95) collects together the short fictions which Breakwell has been writing over the past 20 years, and the range is as amazingly diverse as one would expect from an author whose literary loves encompass Goya, Kafka and Ronald Firbank. Breakwell belongs to a particularly (though by no means peculiarly) British strain of Surrealism, which delights in finding the bizarre in the everyday (and the more everyday the better). Particularly effective in this respect are Breakwell's parodies (or are they?) of news items from local papers in "The News" and "The Social Scene", in which intimations of all sorts of social tensions are woven in as disruptive sub-texts. But there is nothing whimsical or Beachcomberesque about Breakwell and many of his fictions are extremely disturbing: the long, detailed description of the human gutting in "Calendar"; the compression of a lifetime of bleakness and suffering into little more than a single page in "Memory Lane", the nightmare imagery of "The Artist's Dream" (which begins as a series of drawings and ends as a poem) and the horrible things that animals do to humans in "The Old Mine" and "Trevor's Night Out". Like all Surrealists worthy of the name, Breakwell never cuts his remarkable visions adrift from a very precisely observed social environment, thus making them all the more bizarre, outrageous and hilarious. (Julian Petley)

Where a sparrow falls

Vicky Hutchings

Lebanon Lodge
DESMOND HOGAN *Faber* £10.95

ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE the demands of Ireland form the basic narrative of these stories. And in each the protagonist pays a price: whether it be exile, loss, pain or death.

With slow precision, as in the fluidity of a dream, we are presented with images of Ireland, epiphanic images that mutate, coalesce and are replaced by their contraries: black and white, red and green, blue and gold. The "entire palette of Ireland" is transmuted into everlasting life: the white rosary beads falling from the pocket of a fornicating man; the "palatial" white headdresses of a gaggle of black-garbed nuns; the red blood running from the wound of a white hamster; the "pornographic deluge of ketchup" over a meal; the jade green farm, the emerald green air, the perennial green landscape of Irish history.

In the title story, Lucien Hoagman — Jew, descendant of exiles — preserves some kind of sanity by leaving Ireland for Maida Vale and becoming an exile in turn. He loses his Irish accent, he loses touch with his Jewish brothers in Ireland, he marries the daughter of a failed rural Tory Parliamentary candidate and becomes an insurance broker. His children, who bore him, have crossed some border of understanding and can never come back.

Lucien searches for something to explain how Ireland — in the shape of Ethel Bannion's challenge: "Come, show us what a circumcised prick that doesn't work looks like" — has mangled him behind the outward success of his middle age. He finds some kind of explanation in his old home, a

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house called Lebanon Lodge, named in all innocence long before that city became the world's bloodiest trouble spot. It was where his father had often led the Jews of Dublin out of the old year as "the Bridegroom of the Torah and brought them back to Lebanon Lodge for festivities". Now the house has been sold and is owned by a member of the ruling party of Ireland, the same party to which Ethel Bannion's husband belongs. There is nothing left for Lucien in Ireland, but still the ghostly presence of the house remains with him; symbol of the marriage of Jewish and Irish history that produced him and then failed. In 1970 he had visited Beirut and realised that: "Nothing in this city, for all its carnage, can be worse than what Ireland tried to do to me."

Love and sex appear to bring escape for the tall red-haired Sheona Barrett in "Players". Then the town becomes aware that she is having an affair with Cathal Mahaffy, one of the Mahaffy Players who come once a year to the town — she has shed a 40-year-old skin and become a young woman. The black-gowned priest is sent to bring the love affair to an end. He fails and the town has to act: "They knew where Cathal Mahaffy's fingers went. They knew only too well." For a week, as the theatre folk move among them, the town has hovered deliciously on the edge of sin, of theatre, of passion: "You had to titillate people through the arts with a sense of sin to reaffirm all the church stood for." Religion and sin; two sides of the same coin. Sheona Barrett had made the mistake of not recognising the nature of that join and has to be taught a lesson. But the lesson goes awry, the rape is violent and Sheona, "mentally damaged", is moved to a mental home in Galway.

Another unsuccessful attempt to evade the shackles of Ireland is the tale of Magella ("A Marriage in the Country") who kills her husband by setting fire to the house. She had not known that he was upstairs, snoozing. Her daughter is taken away but Magella stays and works in the bar: "People supposed that the shock of what she had done had cured her and in a genuinely solicitous way they thought that working in the pub, chattering to the customers would be better than an internment in a mental hospital." But she falls in love with Boris Cleary, son of a Russian sailor and a Wexford prostitute; the gold on the cornfields leads to the hidden places in the greenwoods surrounding the village. Then they are seen — and the image of Magella's heavy white thighs in an act of love which has a Bolshevik ferocity holds the village in thrall. "Killing your husband was one thing but making love to a young Russian was another." Within a month Magella is put in a mental hospital.

"Patsy, what is beauty?" asks a nine-year-old boy of his father's assistant in the draper's shop in "Ties". "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," comes the well-used reply. Then Patsy Fagan "pulled down his jaded trousers, opened up his knickers and exposed his gargantuan balls. . . The same year he tried to put the same penis in the backside of a drummer in the brass band." The "great magnitudes of sin. . . incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, prostitution, nymphomania" that appear in *Lebanon Lodge* are precisely chronicled, stripped of all extraneous detail to give us Ireland with a strange and uncomfortable beauty. Where, if a sparrow falls from the sky, Desmond Hogan will be watching.

PAPERBACKS

If reading be the love of food

Jenny Diski

THERE'S BEEN A LOT of talk lately about the connection between eating and sex. I wouldn't argue about that, since it's as plain as the mouth in your face, but there's another association that has been much less the subject of analysis. The eating/reading syndrome might be worth a paper or two.

I was reminded of this other connection, as I always am, by reading Nabokov, a feast if ever there was one. **King Queen Knave** (Oxford, £3.95) is a reissue of an early Russian novel. You can almost taste the prose on your tongue, piquant and delicious, and always, somehow, a secret treat, like bingeing.

I feel vaguely guilty for the pleasure I get from Nabokov's sinuous style. His sneer at bourgeois morality and taste is set in a language that sizzles. His imagery is mad: inanimate objects are terrorised by the life around them; mirrors are exhausted with their efforts at reflecting; desks cringe and hold their breath when angry humans approach to rummage through their drawers. The novel has a pair of contingent lovers who casually plot adultery and fantastic murder; a victim-husband who wanders unscathed through their traps, protected by his dreamlike smugness — and Nabokov, of course, who chortles away delightedly at their plight.

There's the sound of restrained chortling in Junichiro Tanizaki's **Diary of a Mad Old Man,** (Oxford, £3.95). An old man writes a diary of his final days, noting the parallel development of decay and desire. The object of his obsession is his pert, Westernised daughter-in-law, Satsuko, who understands and plays on his new-found masochism. He matches physical pain with the sensual kind:

> I had begun to feel an excruciating pain in my left hand. And yet I also felt an acute sense of pleasure. As I looked into Satsuko's malicious face the pain — and the pleasure — became more and more intense.

The diary acknowledges the unpleasant truths of his dying time with a brisk honesty and a certain grim humour, as if it were too late now for pretence or self-recrimination. A strange and moving novel.

None of the Gothic allegories in Angela Carter's reissued collection of short stories, **Fireworks** (Virago, £2.95), lush and beautifully written though these are, has as much haunting power as the three superb stories she sets in present-day Japan. Here, the narrator's otherness is savoured to its full; the Western woman and her Japanese lover collude in a debilitating pretence of passion: " . . . how far does a pretence of feeling, maintained with absolute conviction, become authentic?"

I found the allegorical narratives, like that of the morally disfigured community where only the executioner's daughter is beautiful, too knowing, too aware of their own undertow to work as tales of this sort, told in innocence, can. Their power is diminished by the post-analytical wink author and reader give each other. But the Japanese stories, placed in a landscape that is only apparently familiar, work on silent levels, as the storyteller treads concrete, alien pavements trying to make sense of her desire for the unreal.

The characters in Margaret Atwood's stories in **Bluebeard's Egg** (Virago, £3.95) also have trouble with reality. Things are obscurely wrong. Loulou the potter, earth mother to a clutch of patronising poets, flees in the direction of a down-at-heel accountant, but returns to cook the poets' supper without being quite sure why. Will, belying his name, finds himself middle-aged and confused by a series of inconclusive encounters with women who inexplicably have all grown pallid and thin. Yvonne, who follows men in the street and asks to draw them, finally encounters an iconoclastic youth who tells her that art, and possibly Yvonne's life, sucks. All their inner lives have a lyric quality that only sometimes turns out to be self-deception.

Bernard Levin's latest collection of journalism, **In These Times** (Sceptre, £3.95), is a virtuoso display of passion. The man, you realise, is a romantic at heart. He scourges injustice and ideological dogmatism with a dogmatism that is all his own. You weep for the world when he describes the blind insanity of justice in South Africa, and then you boggle with amazement as he describes, with embarrassing devotion, Margaret Thatcher's attention to her hairstyle before she emerged from her bomb-blasted hotel room in Brighton. It proves her indomitable professionalism, we are told, but also her feminity:

> . . . you do not need to know much about women in general, let alone about this particular one, to know the role that clean and tidy hair plays in that sex as a strengthening of feminity, a raiser of morale and an assurance that all is well within.

Really? Do you suppose if I washed and brushed my hair with the fervour of our Prime Minister . . .?

Which leaves us with **Intercourse** (Arrow, £3.50). Andrea Dworkin offers us her insights on that subject — from, as the publicity says, "Mahler to Tolstoy" (surely the wrong direction?) and "Joan of Arc to Tennessee Williams".

By thrusting into women, men take possession. Penetration is an invasion of privacy. Well and good, but it strikes me that the imagery of the thrusting, invasive cock belongs to the male discourse; why does Dworkin accept it so totally, denying the equal power of the vulva? Man, she says, "expresses his elemental dominance of her in the fuck". I don't know; I suspect they're more interested in clean and tidy hair. □

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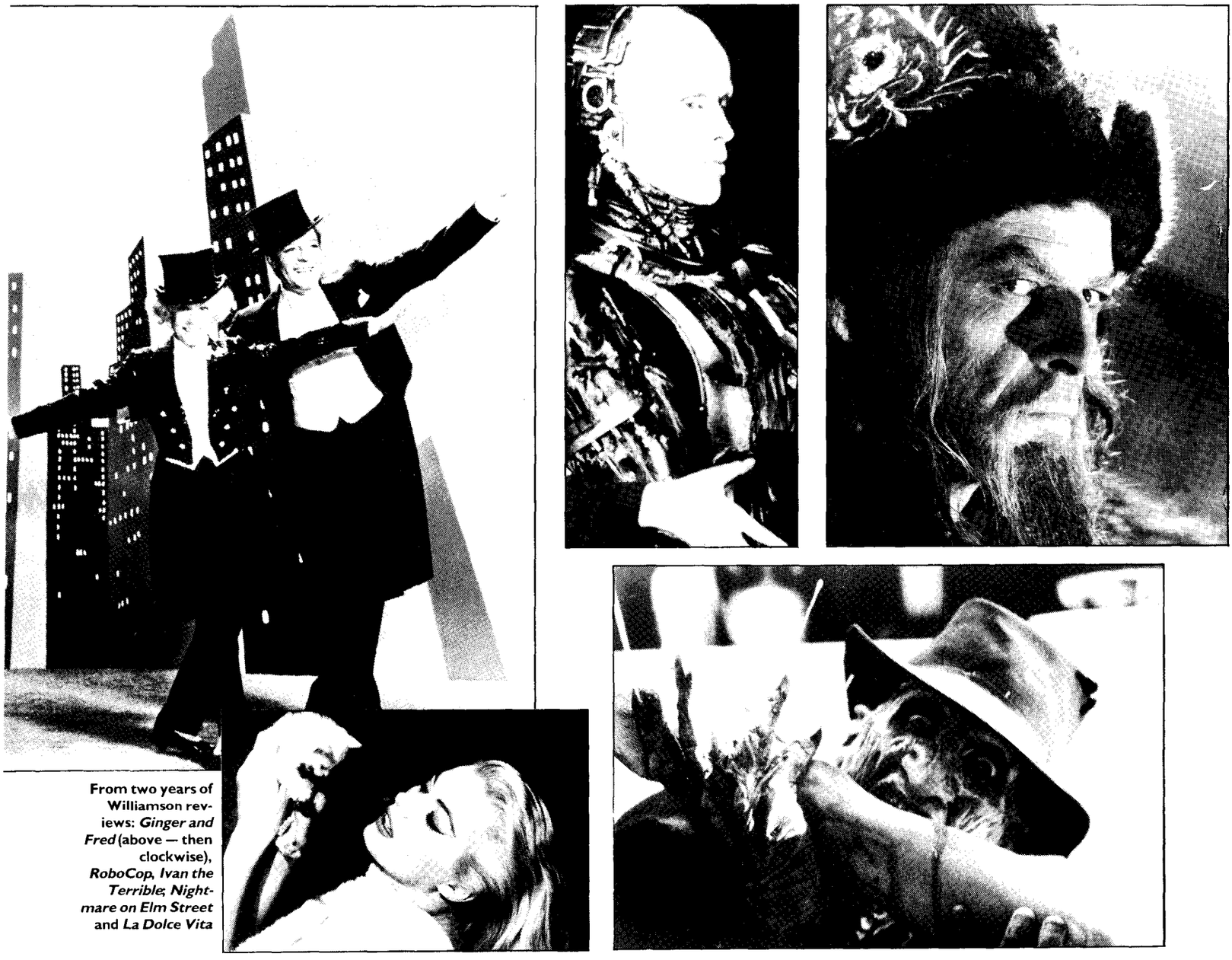

From two years of Williamson reviews: *Ginger and Fred* (above — then clockwise), *RoboCop*, *Ivan the Terrible*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *La Dolce Vita*

The short good-bye

In her final cinema column, **JUDITH WILLIAMSON** *argues for a criticism which doesn't treat media as merely interchangeable symptoms of modern life*

FILM IS a unique medium. Writing about a film is different — or should be different — from writing about a book, or writing about a record. Yet our traditional film criticism — the kind familiar in the mainstream press — has always tended to treat films like novels: plot and characterisation are assessed, themes drawn out and, by the more socially minded, some sort of Leavisite analysis of cultural and moral worth attempted.

Around the time I started this column in 1986 I wrote a "manifesto" which was both a critique of what I call mainstream criticism and a laying out of guidelines for myself. I attacked the notion of films as discrete art objects that it is critics' job to evaluate according to some supposedly objective criteria. The idea of the art critic responding in isolation to the individual painting and pronouncing its intrinsic worth, the film critic sitting in the dark and deciding which films are "good" and which "bad", ignores the extent to which meanings are determined by social context and also assumes that the critic herself has no position but is somehow "neutral".

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Against the backdrop of this evaluative criticism it has been an important project to place cinema in a social context and examine its meanings as part of a wider cultural currency. As I have frequently pointed out, to "work" successfully (make money) mainstream films have to deal in some way, however oblique, with the concerns of their audience and thus function to some extent as a barometer of the social climate. It is possible to read films "symptomatically" and such a criticism can be politically valuable for its diagnosis of ideological conditions.

Yet there is one phenomenon which worries me more now than it did in '86 and that is the tendency to use this kind of "cultural criticism" perspective to treat all media as interchangeable, all as merely channels for ideological messages or fashionable concerns — an approach which shares precisely the same premise as the more traditional criticism. Whatever the difference between treating films as art objects or as ideological symptoms, both approaches fundamentally ignore film as *film*.

A concern for the specific physical properties of film has always been a characteristic of the avant-garde — to the extent that some experimental film-makers have created works without even filming but by scratching the surface of the film stock — but it should not be a concern which is *confined* to the avant-garde. A materialist criticism which seeks to understand the real world (an unfashionable concept these days) must get to grips with the medium as something concrete, not just as a vehicle for ideas or meanings which can be extracted and then critiqued. What are the particular qualities of film? What can it do that other media can't? How does film work, spatially, aurally, graphically? These are questions that filmmakers must ask (not that they always do) — and so should critics.

However, they are not questions that are easily answered except through a lot of watching. There is no short cut to the experience of films — actually seeing them, seeing how they work, seeing how they work in different ways. And this is the other thing about both the traditional and, even more, the new postmodern approach: specific knowledge of film forms and of their history appears redundant.

Each film exists temporally on two axes: socially, culturally, politically, it is a part of the present in which it is made — but it is also a part of the history of cinema, belonging perhaps to a particular genre whose framework has developed over time, drawing perhaps on technical innovations that have produced visual effects, drawing, perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously, on the styles of films that are already a part of that history. This is not to suggest that cinema "progresses": it doesn't necessarily get better, but it does *have* a history (the two notions have been so mixed up in recent theoretical writings that history is rapidly be- coming another outdated concept). And it does help, in understanding film, to know something of that history, to have seen films.

But knowledge, too, is becoming a dated category. It has never been all that easy to produce serious, informed journalism in a profession dominated by short deadlines and short memories.

This is the last cinema column which I'll be writing in this magazine; I hope that in the last two years I have done more or less what I'm talking about here. □

TELEVISION

Smacks of murder

W. Stephen Gilbert

NOBODY WRITES ABOUT soldiery, of all classes, with greater authenticity than Charles Wood. His scripts are often vivid and hilarious, unblinkingly accurate on the cruel reality of being asked to fight for a half-digested notion of what is being defended — or, more truthfully, what is being imposed.

He has no illusions about the officer class. His 1969 play *H,* mounted by the National Theatre at the Old Vic, depicted the leader of a famous march through India at the time of the Mutiny, Brigadier-General Sir Henry Havelock, as a toy officer on a toy horse, unwittingly seeing history ride past him. In his screenplay for the much-maligned, blindly underrated movie *The Charge of The Light Brigade* (about the shooting of which he wrote a dazzling stage play, *Veterans,* in which John Mills played Trevor Howard to John Gielgud's very accurate impersonation of himself) Wood has Lord Raglan (Gielgud) say: "It will be a sad day for England when her soldiers know too well what they are doing. Smacks of murder!"

For that quote, I am indebted to Wood's absorbing introduction to the published text of **Tumbledown**, his script filmed by Richard Eyre for the BBC and shown on Tuesday. In the same essay, Wood observes drily: "I am not interested in writers who are not subversive. Most dramatists are. Privileged researchers working as dramatic chroniclers are hardly ever".

Such a specific thrust is easily explained. The writer Ian Curteis, author of such highly researched dramatic chronicles as *Suez,* was commissioned by the BBC to write *The Story of the Falklands War.* Amid much public acrimony, this project was cancelled and Curteis has pursued a lucrative career as an all-purpose lobbyist for reactionary media causes in the Tory press ever since.

Wood's *Tumbledown* has been cast by default (and unseen, of course) as the "villain of the piece" by the Curteis faction. He is fully entitled to his put-down, but the BBC's best possible answer to Curteis' tedious, never-ending campaign of attrition is the transmission of Wood's film. It is by no stretch of the imagination the Marxist or even the peacenik version of a piece of adventuring that commentators to the left of Wood on this and some other matters (me, for instance) consider the most shaming of all scandals in the grubbiest era we have known.

The story is taken from the experiences of a 22-year-old lieutenant in the Scots Guards, Robert Lawrence. He was hit in the back of the head by a single high-velocity bullet as his platoon took the peak of Tumbledown Mountain in the dying moments of the invasion of the Malvinas by Thatcher's troops. Lawrence's wound was obviously very grave, leaving half his motor functions paralysed and the public school ethos he had subscribed to pretty much in tatters. He was awarded the Military Cross.

That Wood should interest himself in the Falklands is clearly not for geo- or any other political reason, nor animated by the astonishing, if unremarked, coincidence that the war's most celebrated military casualty had the very nickname Wood used for his play title 13 years earlier. His particular concern is actually dramatised in the film, bracketing the action in the South Atlantic and the detail of Lawrence's subsequent treatment. The film opens triumphally with an exhilarating sportscar dash through Cotswold countryside as Robert and his pal Hugh drive to visit George and Helen in their picturesque cottage.

That George Stubbs represents Charles Wood can't be doubted. Wood's position is the detached, open-minded stance of the host. His script exactly charts this interest : he feels a numb horror at what has befallen Robert; he wants to know the story in its detail; his own knowledge of military matters chimes with what Robert reports; he tells what he has been told, dispassionately but with the enthusiast's eye for an illuminating detail (Robert's punctilious doffing of his civilian panama to his commanding officer recalls the yeoman's doffing at the keys ceremony at the Tower of London).

The reason why George and Robert should be chums is missing from the film. Having arrived late for the viewing, I subsequently had the projectionist run the start again for me because it was a relationship I couldn't fathom. The opening adds no more than to state that George is an interested host. I think Wood has made a mistake in trying to contrive some context in this way. The rest of the film is most confidently constructed in a switchback as intricate as any I can recall. Yet, though I did view it arse-about-face, I never lost my way nor my long-established trust in this sadly unfashionable writer's navigational powers.

It remains to commend, as highly as I can, the production laid on for Wood By Richard Broke. Himself disabled, Broke may have felt an affinity with Lawrence's story that transcends his commitment to earlier projects — at any rate, he has done nothing to touch this. Richard Eyre's direction, flowing with assurance, knows exactly when to stay back, when to track fast and cut hard, when to put us in the hand-held thick, how to carry off the big, difficult moments with gusto. The deployment of emotion and psychology is unerring. And, in holding back the battle sequence until the end, Wood has set Eyre a horrendous challenge. But even without making allowance for the limits of television budgets, the climax is an astonishing achievement.

Andrew Dunn's camerawork, Ken Pearce's editing, Richard Hartley's score and Shaunna Harrison's make-up will surely be rewarded by BAFTA. As for Colin Firth's performance, the only proper word is "heroic". □

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ARCHITECTURE

Reincarnation

Jules Lubbock

Whatever anybody says, planning controls need not *result in a grey, featureless cityscape*

IN MY RECENT article on the public inquiry into Messrs Palumbo and Stirling's plans for tearing-down-and-rebuilding the heart of the City of London, I argued that conservation had not "gone too far" and that planning controls were justifiable even on Thatcherite principles. Those controls that we have, particularly in conservation areas, cumbersome though they can be, have neither impeded development nor resulted in a grey, bureaucratic style of architecture.

The City of London today, in its ferocious determination to see off the challenge of Docklands, is one huge building site. Much of the centre is a conservation area, and no other one in the world can be under such intense pressure. Yet the City Fathers, led by the Planning Chair Michael Cassidy, who introduced a more permissive regime in 1986, are actually demanding *more* aesthetic control from this government. If the circle can be squared here, then no city in Britain has any economic excuse for failing to conserve its architecture.

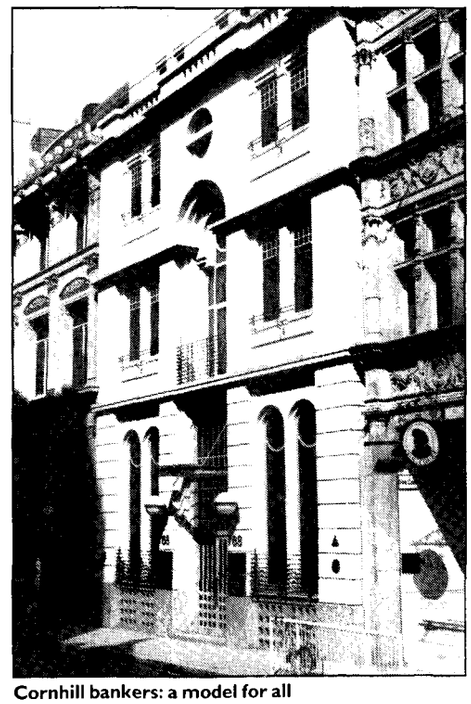
Recent schemes show what is possible. First of all, a six-storey office block, bang on the corner of Wren's Monument.

Monument office block: rhymes with Wren

This is not great architecture, it is full of solecisms, yet it possesses an attractive corner with its exaggerated cornice and modest turret. Encountering it from the corner of Eastcheap and Fish Street Hill, the six-sided lantern neatly performs a respectful rhyme with the spire of Wren's St Magnus Martyr — whose walls "hold inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold" — and links it with the pedestal of the Monument. And lo, the city is reborn! — in the kind of cockney deference befitting a mere office-block between two such civic monuments, the kind that Mappin and Webb shows but that so-called "great architects" like James Stirling are incapable of: "Take that, Sir Christopher; take it or leave it," they bellow.

Cornhill is little changed since the late 19th century. When a 1960s office block in Cheapside is redeveloped, within lower height limits negotiated by the City with the owners, we shall be able to enjoy, along 150 yards of its length, a magnificent view of the dome of St Paul's (providing, that is, that the Stirling gobstopper isn't allowed on the Palumbo site). Half-way down Cornhill stand the offices of a Viennese bank, housed in what looks like a building designed by an immigrant Austrian in 1900. It is, in fact, three years old — by Rolfe Judd, a London firm specialising in refurbishment. It is witty, in the best traditions of modern architecture, by no means a pastiche and an instance of the revival of solid masonry facades, one of the recent success stories of the British construction industry responding to conservationist demand. Here is a model — for the selective rebuilding of a facade in a heavily listed conservation area — that Mr Palumbo should be following.

Bracken House: the city's last classical building



Cornhill bankers: a model for all

Finally, in Cannon Street, to the south of St Paul's, stands Bracken House, formerly the *Financial Times* building. Designed by Sir Albert Richardson, completed in 1959, it's the last classical building in the City, swallow of that more beautiful post-war spring that we were denied when the modernist hordes swept down on us. Indeed, that invasion began with a demonstration of architecture students in front of Bracken House.

After a competition for total redevelopment, won by Michael Hopkins in 1987, the present Secretary of State rightly listed it. Hopkins, a so-called "hi-tech" architect, has now kept the brick facades, front and back, and slung his steel-and-glass, column-free structure between them like a Victorian suspension bridge, such as Brunel's at Clifton. Here is a revival of the authentic tradition of our great railway stations and bridges, where engineering and masonry past and present were married in modern harmony. Most modern architects are ignorant fools with small history and less engineering. Hopkins has plenty of both — and actually improves upon Richardson's building.

So, great modern commercial architecture — which fully respects people's love for the past as well as their excitement in the present — is indeed possible, even within the overwhelming development pressures of today's City. There is no need for Stirling's bulldozer of a building. Conservation controls are producing office blocks full of delight, as well as fully compatible with current business needs, whereas Docklands, without any controls, is turning out to be an environmental disaster which can never compete with the City.

On all these grounds, Mr Ridley should declare his confidence in the success of the City's planning policies and back them by rejecting Stirling's scheme for the Mansion House site. Mr Palumbo, a genuine patron who now declares that he is "actually a conservationist", should then pursue a course he admitted to be feasible back in 1984 and negotiate with the City on a wonderfully imaginative scheme for rehabilitation: an example to the whole world.

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THEATRE

The little people

Victoria Radin

Stars in the Morning Sky
ALEXANDER GALIN *Riverside Studios*
Uncle Vanya
ANTON CHEKHOV *Vaudeville Theatre*

CAN YOU IMAGINE Margaret Thatcher (or Neil Kinnock) taking, say, David Edgar on a diplomatic mission? Yet Gorbachev felt that Mikhail Shatrov, an eminent writer of modern history plays, was an indispensable counsel on a recent visit to Washington.

Shatrov is also a member of the ruling committee of the Soviet Theatre Workers' Union, a new administrative body which has supplanted the dead bureaucratic structures of the Ministry of Culture. Censorship — that arrogant procedure by which, before they could open, plays were vetted not only for political correctness but production values — has been thrown out the window.

Watching Shatrov and the half a dozen other members of a Soviet delegation to the Riverside Studios last week, I felt a mixture of envy and sadness. Envy: because even during the worst times drama has remained at the centre of Soviet life in a way that we in the West cannot imagine. It is now undergoing a renaissance: people are fighting for seats at the 640 Russian theatres and at the unofficial studios that are springing up.

On the other hand, sadness: this Soviet dramatic flowering must be set in the context of what went before. An excerpt from one of the most celebrated Shatrov plays, *Onward, Onward, Onward,* as performed by a group of British actors at Riverside, revealed a superior form of docudrama whose daringness resided in its view of Stalin.

Stars in the Morning Sky, which has come to Hammersmith as part of a world tour after great success at home, gives one a stronger sense of vitality still grappling with frontiers. Its subject — a group of Moscow prostitutes — has been hailed as revelatory by a country which seems to have forgotten Gorky and its own stage adaptations of Dostoevsky. And there is a certain schematic morality in the writing of Alexander Galin, one of the "new wave" who write ungrandly about the little people. Based on the sweeping of "undesirables" from the Moscow streets during the Olympics of 1980, it is set in the derelict former mental asylum to which four of their number have been removed. They are essentially good-hearted; their warder, a dried-up female bureaucrat who will be familiar to those who saw the Maya Kovsky Company's production of *Tomorrow is War* at the National Theatre, is — firmly — not. Although Galin is keen on the discrepancy between the brutality of these people's lives and their child-like aspirations, he is not interested in exploring larger ambiguities of character.

Yet he does develop an immense imaginative sympathy for these crushed and rejected people, which Lev Dodin's production of heightened poetic realism, for Leningrad's Maly Theatre, pushes beyond the limits of what one thought possible. A back wall creates a narrow stage across which the actors are displayed horizontally, as in a painting: the wall vanishes for a brief moment of freedom and then comes down again, shutting the women in. At another moment, it seems perfectly fitting that Laura, the whore who claims she is a trapeze artist, can blow out the naked electric light bulb like a candle before embarking on a seduction of the escaped inmate whose consummation is merely her cradling of his head on her breast.

There are several such cradlings; and keening and howling sounds; and snatches of music and song which are delivered in a powerful but utterly unactressy manner by the young company, all former students of the director at the Leningrad Theatre Institute. These are actors of astonishing physicality: Maria, a portrait of mixed bravado and shuddering vulnerability by the tiny Natalya Akimova, climbs up iron bedsteads and can collapse herself into a minute parcel of despair. Even when its members are still, the company vibrates with an energy which makes none of its more daring movements seem contrived. The product of some nine months' rehearsal, this immaculate production is yet another lesson from afar on the virtues of taking theatre very seriously.

Beyond the particularised suffering is a Chekhovian sense of the universality of misery, the impossibility of happiness in the here and now and an echo, in the women's yearning for Moscow, of *The Three Sisters*. Every Russian dramatist writes under the shadow of Chekhov; and it would be wonderful for all us British Chekhovians to see what the Soviets make of him now. Instead, with the exception of David Thacker's rendering of *The Seagull* a couple of years back, we seem doomed to our own rather duff productions; of which Michael Blakemore's **Uncle Vanya,** in all its starriness and despite a gorgeous new translation by Michael Frayn, is a case in point.

There is some very good work here. Jonathan Pryce (after the very similar Trigorin in that *Seagull*) makes Astrov an unpredictable workaholic, not so "blunted" as he maintains, whose passions stand a chance of getting the upper hand. Michael Gambon, who would seem perfect casting for the hangdog titular role, enters promisingly with an unscripted yawn, a little stretch and a vague "Ye-es"; after which he subsides into near invisibility. Immelda Staunton as his niece, exponent of pure self-abnegation, is a stunning example of this actress's ability to throw herself into a role: fierce, pathetic and horribly resigned.

Miniscule and attired with immaculate dowd in a series of strict grey housekeeper's dresses, she is also got up to be rather too resistably unappealing, too important a contrast to the noble height (hoisted further by high heels) and *Vogue*-ish sartorial and cosmetic perfections of Greta Scacchi's *femme fatale* of a Yelena. About Scacchi's performance I shall otherwise draw a veil, as she herself appears to do onstage.

The evening does not flow: its moments of comedy and physical burlesque seem strenuously prepared for: a lethargy prevails well outside the bounds of textual duty. We are in need of some Russian lessons.

I am grateful for the ones I have received in pursuit of this column over the past two years: they were among my very best nights out. This is my last column for this journal. Hail and farewell. □

ART

Surreal nostalgia

Brandon Taylor

Does the newly opened Liverpool Tate justify all the hype?

IN THE BOOKSHOP of the Liverpool Tate you can buy a publication called *Lern Yerself Scouse,* which tells you how to say useless things in Liverpudlian, such as "Erz aah rennery" ("This is where we keep the poultry"). Somehow this captures much of the spirit and content of the new Tate of the North, ensconced as it is in James Stirling's ten million pound re-do of Jesse Hartley's magnificent 19th-century Albert Dock warehouse.

What is not apparent from the publicity handouts is that the Tate's northern headquarters is just a small corner of a much larger development, spanning the Albert Dock on four sides and consisting of shops for the new placeless commodities which are now springing up everywhere. Just along the cobbled pavement from the entrance to the Tate you can buy an inflatable teddy bear, a Samantha Fox poster, a Boy George hologram, a sailor's clock, an olde-style lace teacloth and much, much more. Whether this is good for Liverpool, or for anybody, is another matter. Certainly these are signs of the times: that is, the "olden times", the times of seafaring and wooden barrels, otherwise identifiable as the nostalgic petty kitsch of the leisure consumer, the tourist, the Sunday stroller of the year of our Lord 1988.

The art at present on show in the Liverpool Tate seems almost exactly attuned to this mixture of surrealism and nostalgia. On the one hand, a small selection from the London Tate's holdings of Surrealist art of the 1920s and '30s is now on long loan to Liverpool, including many documents and periodicals, as well as major paintings by Picasso, Nash, Miro, Dali, Ernst and Magritte. British Surrealism is especially strong, and Roland Penrose and Conroy Maddox, on this evidence, compare well with the continental iconoclasts in their power to disrupt and unsettle. Jackson Pollock's small upright painting "Birth" (1938-41) shows just how inventive he was, and how early. A small 1945 Gottlieb likewise. Yet curators must come to terms with the fact that the Surrealists were vehemently opposed to culture and the museum, including the modern art museum, which tends to legitimate and hence fossilise the most challenging work. As André Breton said in 1929, "The approval of the public is to be avoided like the plague."

The other exhibitions at the Northern Tate succeed in looking backwards, or inwards, or both. *Starlit Waters* is the title of a survey of British sculpture from 1968 to 1988 — that theme again — as well as the name of a piece by Ian Hamilton Finlay. In effect it covers the last five years.

The curators have dressed the thing up in pompous talk of "the English heritage" in sculpture, and tell us that the sort of work promoted here has generated "widespread appeal and continued success", especially abroad, which is where

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the British Council has regularly placed it. Alan Bowness, still Director of the Tate until Nicholas Serota takes over this summer, writes that recent British sculpture constitutes nothing less than "a dialectic, an argument about the nature and meaning of sculpture" — he is referring to Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Anish Kapoor *et al.* How this is supposed to inflame the passions, I do not know. And the show looks as dead as a doornail: the "new" British sculpture is full of quiet, acquiescent little bits of conformity that are about as challenging as a cup of cold tea. Work by Cragg, Woodrow and the gang may pack up very nicely into British Council boxes for transportation round the world, but it has nothing to tell us either about art, or life, or Liverpool. It is time someone put it in a box and left it there.

The brainwave of the Liverpool Tate, however, was to hang the Seagram Restaurant murals of the late Mark Rothko: those sombre, brooding panels that have come in for such reverence and misunderstanding over the years. Given the current wave of sentimentality for any aspect of '50s American culture, it comes as a surprise that this was the most rewarding of the Tate's new shows.

Michael Compton, of the London Tate, has gathered the very contradictory evidence surrounding Rothko's state of mind at the time of the commission of these great paintings. Rothko is reported to have described the Seagram Restaurant as "a place where the richest bastards in New York come to feed and show off . . . I hope to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son-of-a-bitch who ever eats in that room". According to Compton, it is difficult in these circumstances to see precisely how, indeed why, Rothko completed the paintings in the way he did. He may have thought that the space allotted to him was adjacent to a workers' canteen. But then the question becomes whether he regarded his sublime, dark paintings as unsettling, or comforting, or somehow both. We are not sure. In the end — which came soon after the paintings were finished — he bequeathed a group of his works to the Tate. Now in Liverpool, they look magisterial amongst all the tat.

Never mind, for the moment, that the ceilings of the new conversion are too low, or that they are cluttered by cumbersome central heating ducts, or that the columns of the old warehouse occasionally obscure your view: such problems are secondary to the main one of choosing interesting art and displaying it in an interesting way. In particular, the Tate must be permanently on guard against distorting the historical purposes of art; and against giving its approval to the dullest and most meretricious of contemporary work, be it ever so British or no. In the end, history, and the Liverpudlians, will be the judge. □

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DANCE

Getting to know you

Stephanie Jordan

Half-way through the Channel 4 dance season, you can see the revolution taking place in TV's approach to dance — and vice versa

WERE YOU TO TURN ON the box and unexpectedly come across Channel 4's current dance season you might imagine that you'd caught a snatch of TV drama, or a soap, or even the ads. Since Mike Kustow began these seasons six years ago, C4's expeditions through dance have changed beyond recognition. At first, it was a matter of luring audiences away from traditional ballet into daring post-modernism, but now the focus is televisual vitality and its meaning for dance.

Aiming to catch a broader audience than that for theatre dance/high art, C4 is now working on the overlap betwen dance and TV. So if you're excited by art video or innovative pop promo, or if you're open to seeing your familiar TV content treated with irony, disengaged or pushed in "unnatural" directions, you might well find yourself fascinated. Meanwhile, C4's Dance-lines workshop has continued, in its second year, to explore the meeting ground between directors and choreographers.

This season began with a Dance-lines 2 project, the Richard Alston/Peter Mumford *Strong Language*, which is instantly recognisable as art dance but knocked into a shape specific to TV — especially with its various location-based pieces, on London's roofs, open spaces, underground and domestic interiors. It ends with perhaps the most radical programme in the series: Ian Spink's collaboration with writer Caryl Churchill (also a Dance-lines 2 project). Only at its end does *Fugue* become recognisably dance. "It's not a dance thing . . . not even a dance theatre thing," Spink admits.

In the current season only one piece, Trisha Brown's *Newark*, directed by Jean-François Jung, was neither made nor thoroughly remade for TV: it was, in any case, perfectly suited to the medium. With minimal choreographic adjustments, Brown has simply furthered the anti-illusionist premise of her piece, the emphasis on the real action of joints and gravity in real time. In some senses, *Newark* asks the ultimate analytical perception from its audience: an awareness of self in relation to a finite TV studio space. You make the rounds through the eye of the camera (the cinemascope effect makes you acutely aware of the frame of vision), sometimes pulling back or closing in on the dance floor. Video wipes make an issue of punctuation.

Fugue is more revealing about the *content* of TV. It concerns a man's death, his bereaved family and their process of coming to terms with his death, invoking past wrongs, giving way to aggressive feelings about him — a type of domestic situation usually guaranteed to mask the forms in which it is presented. But Spink and Churchill make you as much aware of device as content. The family pass on the news "He'd just got out of the bath . . ."; "Mum says he'd just got out of the bath" — with repetitions that are, indeed, fugal. There is a nether reality to the gossiping and clattering of cups at the post-funeral party, the flash-back to a sandy beach that has somehow strayed into the room of a house, the betowelled father raised heavenwards on a Kirby Wire, the scene around a funeral pyre, the family's private, imaginary farewell; stylisation becomes paramount in the final, contrapuntal dance sequence, shot through a fish-eye lens: a self-conscious exaggeration of distance and close-up.

Fugue proves that you can play the game of dramatic intrigue within a formal argument of the strictest kind: entries, subject and counter-subject, resolution and coda (passages from Bach's *Art of Fugue* are the fitting accompaniment). Looked at another way, *Fugue* uses a postmodern tactic for audience engagement: "unnatural" formal concerns revitalise our attention to a familiar human predicament. It recalls Umberto Eco's statement that you can still mean "I love you" but, in an age of lost innocence, you can no longer say it plainly.

Dance-lines director Terry Braun and choreographer Yolande Snaith also play with TV content in *Step in Time Girls*. They refer obliquely to period drama as they reveal three occupants of a house in Rotherhithe: Victorian, war-time and contemporary women. Braun and Snaith stride boldly between periods, suggesting connections across the characters and their situations: the claustrophobia of their poky rooms; an eerie sense that they're all under surveillance. Private obsessions emerge in the most bizarre repeated journeys over tables, chairs, walls and window-sills. Imagery, rhythmic and dynamic structure are compelling, although there are occasions when the dance sequences turn into the merely formal articulation of a space and its surfaces, and the work loses resonance between form and meaning.

Unlike with the other Dance-lines projects, the makers of *Strong Language* seem uncertain as to whether they want their viewers to float with illusion or to be grounded in their own reality. Much of it is a magic journey, a pop space where shadows dance on walls and you're in orbit, sateliting the dancers from crazy vantage points, or you're given a doll's-house view of dancers at split levels, some mysterious veiled visions, moments with an intimate couple sun-kissed and glowing in the dark. But there is a major break in conceptual unity at one point, when the camera pulls back to demonstrate the full studio panoply: lights, hanging screens, the real space.

Strong Language, originally a stage piece, has been transformed for TV: finely restructured, softened, even romanticised, so that it is not so consistently the "strong" language that it once was. As a piece of shooting and editing for TV, it is however a *tour de force*, with racy cutting, contrapuntal challenges in big-pattern sequences and, always, Tony Keene's sensitive camera choreography enlarging the sweep of motion or line, or keying into the crux of an action.

The two weaker programmes in the series are both films. Unfair as it would be to separate out the collaborative elements elsewhere, here — in *Freefall* and *Exit no Exit* — it is clear that, while the filmic aspect is exciting, concept and choreography are less certain. □

The second half of Channel 4's dance season will be transmitted on Sundays 12, 19 and 26 June.

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The truth about Straw

Hilary Armstrong MP, House of Commons

Edward Pearce is entitled to his gratuitous sideswipe at Labour's education spokesman Jack Straw, (*NS* 13 May) but it is not widely shared. It was Paddy Ashdown himself (so highly complemented by Pearce) who praised Straw fulsomely for his performance on the Committee of the Education Bill (see Hansard Standing Committee J C2230) and rebel Tory MP Robert Rhodes James who wrote to his evening paper to record the way Straw had "marshalled his case with exceptional ability and firmness, but also with invariable good humour and courtesy" (*Cambridge Evening News*, 8 April). Perhaps more importantly, Jack Straw gained the confidence and respect of the Labour members of the committee with his open, democratic leadership, and the clarity of his vision and strategy.

It may be that Mr Pearce was an assiduous attender of the standing committee, and of the debates on the Bill on the floor. I was, and cannot recall spotting him. Witnessing events first hand can help one's judgement.

Ubiquitous Sofia rumours

John Burnip, London SE20.

It is a pity that the article on Bulgaria, (*NS* 29 April) should have been so scarred by elementary factual and other errors that the main news content is thereby placed in a somewhat dubious light. To take the errors in order:

1. "Ubiquitous Sofia rumour" is hardly a basis for any statement. Rumours of all kinds constantly circulate and give citizens a great deal of fun. But "numerous arrests, sackings and the prospects of a big political trial . . ."?

2. "The inner grapevine" is as unidentifiable as the ubiquitous Sofia rumour, together with "some say". Choudimir Alexandrov was not, as far as I know, ever Prime Minister — he was one of a group of deputy prime ministers. Balev seems to have fallen victim of a printing error.

3. ". . . have made large parts of the country a disaster area." Wild exaggeration! I have travelled around Bulgaria in recent years, and I can only say that, while there are indeed a number of ugly industrial areas, they are set in the midst of vast agricultural and uncultivated regions of great natural beauty.

4. "The capital's air too is filthy: from the slopes of Mount Sofia . . ." There is no Mount Sofia — can Mr Smith mean Vitosha? If the visit he made to Bulgaria was so brief that he could not even bother to find the correct name, how can he have had a chance to find the truth about the ubiquitous Sofia rumour? Two things are true: first, there was always a mist over Sofia ; I tried for a year, in 1945-46, long before the age of pollution, to make a good panorama of Sofia from Vitosha. I never succeeded. Secondly, there *is* now pollution in Sofia — from car fumes. In 1945 there were very few cars; now they are legion. Parking is agony and petrol fumes as bad as inner London. Have we the cheek to criticise? The Vitosha National Park is a wonderful lung for the people of the capital.

5. Coffee and potatoes etc. Shortages are sporadic, though the coffee famine seems endemic. I did not notice a potato shortage in October, but may be it has developed since. In relatively poor countries, the vast food mountains of the West are unknown. If you want orange juice, you may have to put up with grapefruit. There is no real shortage of food in general. Nor were power cuts of 1985 proportions inflicted. The 1985 situation was more complex than I have space to deal with here, I will merely recall the empty reservoirs resulting from two successive drought years. Does Mr Smith criticise his friends for being poor?

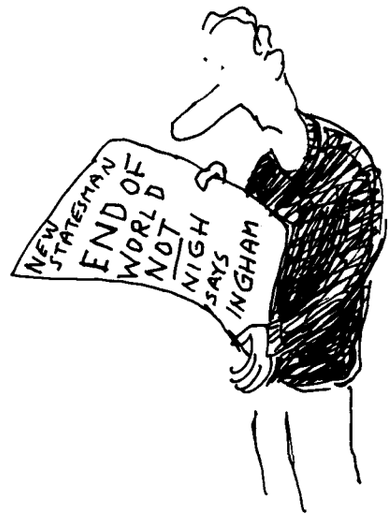
It is a great pity that Mr Smith embarked on a series of unresearched shrieks, instead of concentrating on the chlorine from Romania. As it happens, I have never had occasion to go to Rousse (my interests are literary) so I am forced to rely on press reports, but the article by Mr Smith does not, in the circumstances, help much. What does he want? A Bulgarian invasion of Romania?

Clement Smith writes: Mr Burnip's main complaint is at my supposed reliance on "rumour" and "grapevine". The sources for my report on environmental crisis, persecution of ecological campaigners, and leadership changes included private conversations with senior Party officials in Sofia. For obvious reasons I could not in my article, and cannot now, identify those sources more precisely than this. However, Mr Burnip should have noted that these events, first reported in the *New Statesman,* have since received wider corroboration in Western press reports.

I did not claim that Bulgarians went hungry, but there were specific and apparently increasing shortages. Mr Burnip's remarks on fruit juices are ironic, since last month none at all seemed available in Sofia. Nor did I suggest that the power cuts were on the scale of 1985, or that there were not huge areas of unspoilt natural beauty remaining, but that ecological damage is widespread and serious. *Until* very recently, this was widely and critically discussed in the Bulgarian press. My criticism would indeed be "cheek" from someone who was complacent about the British government's appalling environmental record, but I am far from being so. I wouldn't criticise friends for being poor. I *do* criticise their government for the bureaucratic deadweight which depresses living standards, and for stifling dissent on these issues.

I plead guilty on 1.5 points of detail. My critic and I are both wrong about Alexandrov, who was neither Prime Minister nor *a* Deputy, but *the* Deputy Prime Minister. On Mount Sofia/Vitosha we are both right, in that I have read and heard both names used. It is unclear what error about Balev is referred to.

Mr Burnip evidently shares my regard for Bulgaria's people. I respect his feelings, which stem from longer acquaintance with the country than mine. I do not accept his apparent belief that such sentiment should blind one to mismanagement, censorship and authoritarianism on the part of Bulgaria's rulers. I hope that my critic can at least share my hopes that Sofia will soon follow in the liberalising path pointed by Moscow and Budapest.



What I really said

Bernard Ingham, 10 Downing St, SW1

I am sorry you did not check with me, otherwise you would have discovered that, contrary to what you read in the *Observer*, I did not say "the standards of the media have declined to the point of institutionalised hysteria".

What I told the *Observer* was that a chap in my position, after more than eight years as Chief Press Secretary has to keep a sense of proportion about the media. "After all," I said, "they are really an institutionalised form of hysteria in the sense that we move day to day from one set of screaming headlines to the next reporting that the end of this or that world is nigh."

I would be grateful if you would record this correction.

Revisionist ditchwater

Edward Shanks, Darlington

I found John Reid's response to your critical review of the Labour Party's own review documents (*NS*, 27 May) quite demoralising. He spends a whole page defending "revisionism" and slagging off Tony Benn in the most petty way, and doesn't seem to realise that the team of critics who looked at the draft policy review — Sarah Benton, Paul Hirst, Mary Kaldor and Stephen Howe — are all themselves revisionists, and indeed, Howe's introductory comments write off Benn, albeit in a more respectful way than Reid.

The trouble is, Mr Reid, not that the documents are revisionist, but that they are almost entirely empty of any purpose, let alone radical purpose. Their purpose should not be to marginalise Tony Benn, nor to serve as justification within the party for Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley in this year's leadership contest, but to provide a base for a renewal of Labour's policies and practice out there against Mrs Thatcher.

The criticisms which your four writers advanced still need answering. Is it too much to hope that they may be incorporated now into the redrafting so that the Labour Party doesn't relaunch itself with a bottle of ditchwater?

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Come on, convince me

Pamela Gerrish Nunn, Bristol

Loretta Loach's review of Andrea Dworkin's book of essays and speeches, *Letters from a War Zone* (*NS* 20 May) — ungraciously trailed on the cover as "Andrea Dworkin's sex rant" — rang loud with the compromised illogicalities of those women who basically prefer socialism to feminism but still wish to lay claim to the latter.

Loretta Loach says that: "The ferocity of phallic imperialism has met its match in the anger and bitterness of this book". Well, yes — so why, then, does she deride radical feminism for over-simplifying sexual politics, take Andrea Dworkin to task for omitting "other theories of sexuality and representation", and find fault with the fact that "other feminists' . . . arguments are totally absent from the book?" Don't we all write and speak the particular politics we believe in? The conviction in her own position which Andrea Dworkin shows in her work is not characteristic only of radical feminists, but is the mark of any thinker of note.

If the kind of feminism which Loretta Loach would rather see has been left out of *Letters from a War Zone*, I would imagine it's because Andrea Dworkin finds it unconvincing and inadequate to the task. As, indeed, do many of us, who still have the temerity of the 1970s — "the passion of those times", as Loretta Loach says with an admitted sense of loss — and *mind* about women's subordination, and require that men change. As is habitual with socialist women's criticism of radical feminism, Loretta Loach's review makes it plain that such "rant and rhapsody" are infra dig now, not quite the thing any more, but conspicuously fails to detail what enormous, heart-warming, epoch-making changes have taken place in the last dozen years to render the struggle for women's liberation redundant.

Because it would take no less, in my opinion. True, *talk* about men and women may have become more sophisticated, more subtle, more intricate, but has that lessened the glaring tragedy of women's oppression one tiny jot? As Judith Williamson writes elsewhere in the same issue, "The key fact about the New Man is that he doesn't exist": what then is the basis for Loretta Loach's confident dismissal of Andrea Dworkin's equally convinced challenge? Come on, convince me . . .

Incongruous government

Michael Brennan, Manchester

Professor John Honey (*NS* letters 21 May) queries the incongruity of trade unionism in Poland and Britain with a typical, unsubstantiated assertion regarding the perception of "the great majority of the people" and the role of trade unions. I would suggest that what really is incongruous is the devastation of millions of poor British families by a Tory government that in actuality does not have the authority of a great majority of the people, nor even a simple majority. (I wish I was a Professor.)

Human rights

Robert Chambers, London SW11

It is curious that when a communist or extreme left-winger works for a human rights organisation this is acceptable as human rights, is not "political" and is a matter of consensus and common concern. Why then does Francis Wheen (*NS* 20 May) assume that because a mainstream Conservative works for the International Society for Human Rights this makes the organisation biased.

Is this the same Francis Wheen working for the left-wing *New Statesman* who previously worked for the *Independent*, which proudly proclaims its neutral, apolitical view of the world, and who distinguished himself as a writ-attracting public schoolboy teamaker on the *Guardian*. It could be; and it is. His writing may have improved since then, but I hope his current obsession with bodily functions wanes as he matures.

Doonesbury
BY
G. B. TRUDEAU
HE'S NOT ANSWERING...
'COURSE, IT IS FIVE IN THE MORNING.
BRRRR!
MMPHH
MICHAEL? IT'S JOANIE. DID I WAKE YOU UP?
HUH? ..
NO, NO... I WAS JUST GETTING UP... WHAT'S UP?
MICHAEL, WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YOU AND MY DAUGHTER?
UH... NOTHING. I MEAN, WE'VE BEEN THROUGH A FEW ROUGH PATCHES, BUT I THINK WE'RE IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE NOW... IN FACT, J.J. AND I HAVE PROBABLY NEVER BEEN STRONGER.
MICHAEL?
YES, JOANIE?
YOU'RE DREAMING.
NO, NO, I'M WIDE AWAKE NOW.

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Too philistine

Gerald Hartup, The Freedom Association, London W1

Francis Wheen writes entertainingly and well. It was, therefore, disappointing but not surprising to see him use the term "penis-brained" (*NS* 25 March), presumably as a metaphor for philistine, of someone to whom he is politically opposed. Too many left-wing journalists now unconsciously plagiarise Steve Bell's scatological political comic strips.

Apparently I am the only *New Statesman* reader who feels strongly enough about this use of language to have registered any protest at all. That's a shame.

I wonder whether your readers would be so indulgent were Mr Wheen to make similar metaphorical comparisons of women he considered to be philistines. I hope not.

Why be Anti Soviet?

David Wimborne, Manchester M20

The article by Prof. John Keane (*NS* 20 May) makes it clear that changes in the Soviet Union, both those taking place and those proposed, present academics and journalists with an urgent question. If present bases for anti-Soviet attitudes disappear, what should be chosen as the new bases for anti-Sovietism. Keane suggests a mysterious entity called "civic society" which requires that the Soviet government and Communist Party be largely influenced by groups of dissidents and small pressure groups of intellectuals rather than by the needs of the mass of industrial workers, farmers, scientists, writers, etc.

Perhaps Keane could cooperate with Milton Friedman to develop the thesis that no society lacking private ownership of large-scale industry and agriculture can possibly be democratic?

Not Racist

Ray Honeyford, Manchester M25

Lack of time prevents me from subjecting the piece by Yvonne Roberts on "Anti-anti-Racism" (*NS* 6 May) to the criticism it deserves. Suffice to say this, I have *never* argued that the presence of ethnic minority children in a school "automatically" leads to a decline in standards — as Roberts alleges. What I have said is that where a disproportionate number of pupils are speaking English as a foreign language then academic standards will tend to decline. I say this, not because I am a "racist" as Roberts clearly implies, but because I am anxious to engage in an informed debate about why *some* ethnic minority groups are achieving less than they might. Careless and manifestly biased journalists like Roberts do great damage to the debate about this crucial matter.

Consuming interest

Phil Edwards, Manchester M16

Consumerism is catching. Proof: Sarah Benton's critique (*NS* 20 May) of the findings of the "Consumers and the Community" review group, which is marred by a sudden lapse into that same focus on people as "consumers" which she criticises. Should the estate intervene, she asks, in the food industry or in pornography, "to protect consumers from their own grosser appetites"?

Surely this is the wrong emphasis. Nothing will ever get done, either about the industrial debasement of food or about pornography, while the fault is seen to lie in the masses' well-known love of a "bad diet" or the evil in men's hearts (or trousers). Both the British sausage and the British daily nude can better be considered in terms of what is produced in a society, rather than of what individuals "consume". In this perspective, regulation is not a matter of protecting individuals from what they want, but of protecting society as a whole from things which are bad for society as a whole. It follows from this that any state undertaking this type of regulation will have to have a fairly good claim to support from the whole of society. In other words, if we want to elect a government with distinctly different values from those of Thatcherism, we have to build support for those values on their own terms, rather than trying to propagate them on terms borrowed from Thatcherism — which is where we came in!

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The appointment is for **a two year term.** The salary will be **£15,000 subject to review after a year.** The successful applicant will work from home. A car will be provided. A suitable superannuation arrangement can be discussed. The possibility exists of the appointment being converted into a permanent one at the end of the two years.

Further information can be obtained from:

John Lyons
General Secretary
Engineers' and Managers' Association
Station House
Fox Lane North
Chertsey
Surrey KT16 9HW
(Tel. 0932 564131)

Applications to the above address should be submitted to arrive not later than **28th June 1988.**

Previous applicants do not need to reapply.

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APPOINTMENTS

Chief Executive's Department

As a progressive and caring Inner London Council, an essential part of our work is keeping the community informed of important issues, both local and national, that affect them. These can vary from a planning application to housing grants or the poll tax. Arising from this we have two vacancies, each to supervise a small section dealing with press and publicity and public relations respectively.

Five years experience in press, media or public relations work is required for both principal posts, which are:

Principal press & publicity officer

£17,421 to £18,651 p.a. inc. P04 Grade

This section covers the full range of press services including news releases, Press & Public contacts and helping departments to provide information of interest or help to the local community.

Principal public relations officer

£17,421 to £18,651 p.a. inc. P04 Grade

This Section promotes the Council through events, conferences, media contact including radio, T.V. and a wide range of similar activities of benefit to the Borough.

Applicants with relevant experience are welcome to apply for both posts. A starting salary above the minimum will be considered for suitably experienced candidates.

A further vacancy exists for a:—

Senior press & publicity officer

£12,822 to £15,312 p.a. inc. S01-P01 Grade

This post is located within the Press and Publicity Section and requires two years experience in Press and Publicity or a related media activity.

Please telephone for full details including an application form, job description and person specification to

01-359 9010

or write to: Borough Secretary, Town Hall, Upper Street, London, N1 2UD. Closing date: 10th June 1988.

Jobs are open to all races, both sexes, lesbians and gay men, and we have a positive attitude towards the employment of disabled people. All vacancies are available for job share unless stated otherwise.

ISLINGTON COUNCIL

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WANTED: by probably compatible lady: Manchester(ish), fifty(ish) man; socially and spiritually aware intellectual with social sciences/arts interests and knowledges; awake, active and affectionate. Box (22) 0405.

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Weekend competition

No 3208 **Set by Margaret Rogers**

Poems, please, to be included in the sequel to Kenneth Baker's *English History in Verse* (Faber, £12.95). Sixteen lines max. Entries to be in by 15 June.

No 3025 **Set by E.O. Parrott**

Modern nursery rhymes.

Report **By Ms de Meaner**

You've all done splendidly this week, well all except *one* of you and he'll get mentioned later! Obviously, the chance to return to your respective childhoods and make up childish rhymes and annoy your friends, neighbours, (the cat?) by singing them aloud in the bath, induced a mass outbreak of creativity in your fertile little minds. Special mentions to: Ken Rudge, Frank James, George Goatley, Mrs K. Macintyre, John Marriott and June Lampfield. £7 to all the winners, plus an extra special £3 to C. Fever for making me laugh. And now to Gerard Benson, from Islington, for it is he: asking *me* to find a word that rhymes with "cabinet" to finish your entry is *not* one of the 1001 ways to ensure winning the comp.

Baa, baa, hill sheep,
What! No meat nor wool?
No, sir, no, sir, Chernobyl.
Nothing for the farmer,
Nothing for his dame.
And no compensation. Bloody shame!

D.A. Prince

Thatchery atchery
Greedy me
Took the Chancellor
Out to tea

Lawsoney awsoney
Gimme some more
Loadsa money
And screw the poor

John Earl

Acid rain, acid rain,
Falls on Sweden, falls on Spain.
Why do people make a fuss?
None of it will fall on us.
Acid rain, please make it clear,
Princes should not interfere.
Acid rain, it falls down splash,
Saves the country lots of cash.

C. Fever

Lawson, Ridley, Baker, Howe,
It's almost time to eat our cow.
You boil her belly, I'll roast a rib,
Then flog her offal in Gib, Gib, Gib.
Gib Bang, S A S
Who gave the orders?
Guess? Guess? Guess?

Connie Yapp

Four blind mice
All very nice
Where have they gone?
What went wrong?
They all ran after the floating vote
But squabbled so much, they missed the boat
The dream broke up on a sour note
Those poor blind mice.

Frank Roots

Stalker, Stalker
Stalk a talker, Stalker,
Ah! you see him —
Shut his trap!

Hermon, Hermon,
Firmer sermon, Hermon,
Ah! you see him —
Knuckle rap!

Ander, Ander,
Ander panda, Ander,
Ah! you see him —
Clap trap clap!

Will Bellenger

Old Mother Thatcher
Went out to catch a
Chap on the dole who worked.
And when he was caught
He firmly was taught
He'd be much better off if he'd shirked.

Katie Mallett

Willie the Mogg
Goes jiggety-jog
To visit a lady
And find a new job.

Now TV he's cut
It's cleaner now, but
Poor Willie the Mogg
Is still in a fog!

M. Haynes

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To get a mortgage started.
Finding now *one* thirty-thou
Relief — instead, they parted.

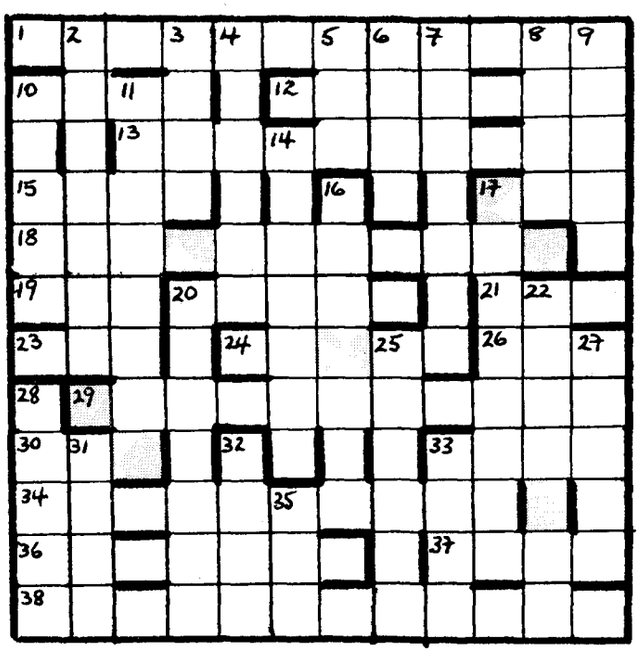
A.D. Gibbons

Salamanca 135

"In This Case"

PRIZES: Copies of the *Collins Concise English Dictionary* for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Salamanca 135, New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by first post 27 June.

COLLINS DICTIONARIES



Seven unclued answers of a kind, mostly consisting of more than one word (without definite articles), must be entered and six of these lack a vital ingredient however many times it occurs, the six ingredients making the first part of the requirement while the shaded areas of the grid make the second. The clues are almost evenly divided between normal-ish and those consisting of definitions and hidden jumbles of their answers: 13 is two words and 4 a variation in OED. (Thanks to RC and CCAL.)

ACROSS

10(4) *Charles Lamb* was the alias I gave, who
13(10) dealt in drugs with a nameless old lady controlling the dramatic show.
15(4) The noisy arguments of the worst kind stopped short:
17(3) the grandchildren in the charpoy stared.
18(11) Jacket off as the order of the day, his vest scruffy with a soiled leer,
19(3) heavyweight fashion,
20(5) an outfit converted, as roundly
21(3) reminiscent of the luckless Moose
23(3) from a former case, solved long ago.
24(5) The room was empty of secretaries and their
26(3) rattle, patter and chat:
30(3) the wood study weakly lit
33(4) with a red mercury bulb:
36(7) the Greak Lake too swollen with rain
37(4) in the semi-distance shone one time only.

DOWN

2(7) "Drink like a fish, the whole lot swallowed",
3(4) he rasped to his listeners.
4(6) The bitter swallow made a twist in his face,
5(3) dull, rising to the centre.
6(4) His lazy egotism went past him like
7(7) large birds seeking bone victims.
8(4) Right eye twitching, weird.
9(5) "I know what'll get me a raise in dough" — easy though,
10(5) at first. This'll make you stare —
14(7) "something we can put away for the future, possibily, ten Gs, say, in content,
16(7) a nice wizzo lump sum from that white feathery stuff. Not
17(8) to be too zealous possibly to get trapped in yours and my
20(7) greed and start shooting in ugly panic . . ."
25(6) He had another simple tot — about half a gallon —
27(5) soft eyes shifting, the old balance
28(5) altering, his jolly oxlike voice filling with a coal-tar substance,
31(4) a volcano before going up.
32(4) I turned by the doorpost.
33(4) "You can't be genuine!" he declared.
35(3) "It's a fact they'll hang you!"

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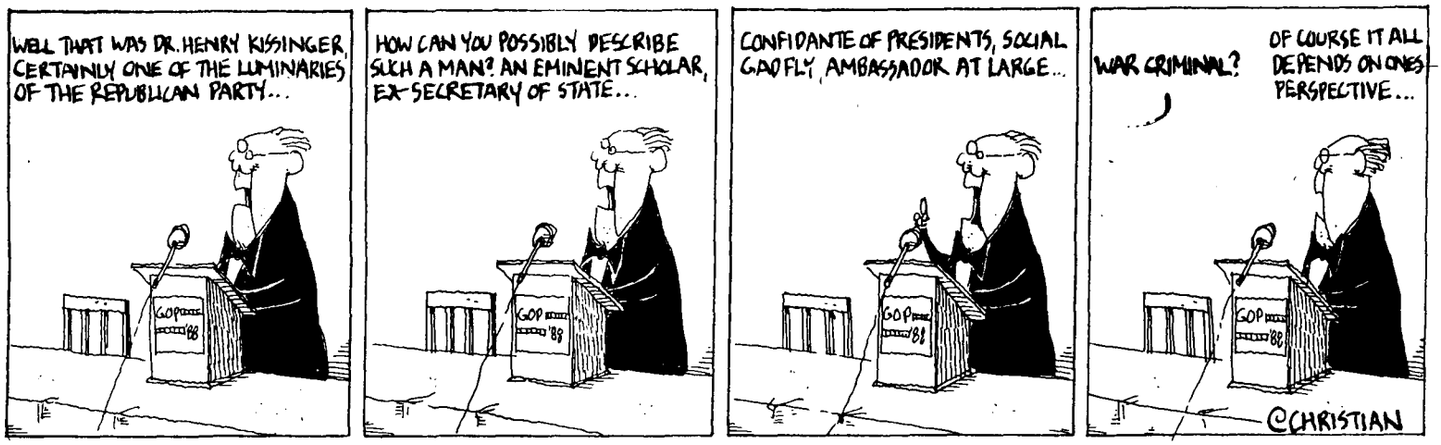
WELL THAT WAS DR. HENRY KISSINGER, CERTAINLY ONE OF THE LUMINARIES OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY...
HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY DESCRIBE SUCH A MAN? AN EMINENT SCHOLAR, EX-SECRETARY OF STATE...
CONFIDANTE OF PRESIDENTS, SOCIAL GADFLY, AMBASSADOR AT LARGE...
WAR CRIMINAL?
OF COURSE IT ALL DEPENDS ON ONES PERSPECTIVE...
GOP '88
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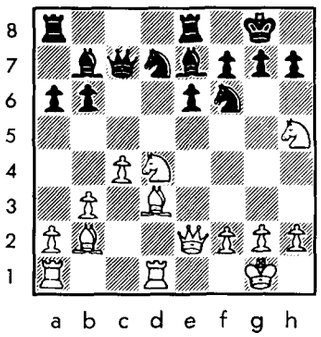
Chess

Kasparov-Karpov:
White to play his 16th



I PROTEST: it's an absolute disgrace. The world's two leading grandmasters larking about like coffee-house skittlers! When I expressed the opinion last week that, in the setting of the Optiebeurs tournament, there was little hope of active engagement between Kasparov and Karpov, any prudent and reasonable person would surely have acquiesced. It would have been so easy for them to have conformed to my prognosis. All they had to do was produce solid moves and a draw by mutual respect.

But could these two be trusted to behave? It seems the young, impetuous world champion has not bothered to learn the catechism of the Grandmaster Draw. For this information it runs as follows. Question: "Are you playing for a win?". Response: "No, you are far too strong for me to insult you like that!". That's the way to do it, Kasparov. Not like this, storming in, hurling pieces at the enemy, without a second thought for either safety or the bitter taste of newsprint ground between the columnist's teeth:

Kasparov-Karpov, Amsterdam 1988. Caro-Kann Defence.
1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nd2 dxe4 4. Nxe4 Nd7 5. Nf3 5. Bc4 and Nunn's 5. Ng5 have been more fashionable of late. Neither is likely to be superior to the simple and flexible scheme of development adopted by Kasparov. It's only after the opening that he goes off his head. **Ngf6 6. Ng3 e6 7. Bd3 Be7 8. 0-0 c5 9. Qe2 0-0 10. Rd1 Qc7 11. c4 cxd4 12. Nxd4 a6 13. b3 Re8 14. Bb2 b6 15. Nh5 Bb7** The exclamation mark attached to White's next is only there through force of habit — sac on e6, give it a shriek. Really it just isn't sound. **16. Nxe6?! fxe6 17. Qxe6+ Kf8** Not 17 . . . Kh8? 18. Qf7. **18. Bxh7** A slow follow-up, threatening to threaten with Bg6. Perhaps Kasparov expected 18 . . . Qc6 19. Qxc6 Bxc6 20. Bg6 with 3 pawns against a piece. **Nc5 19. Qh3 Nxh7 20. Bxg7+ Kg8 21. Bb2** Pausing to take stock we find that, at the cost of two pieces, White has annihilated the Black King's protective shield. But it cannot be enough. The Black pieces are active, there is a target on g2, and a back-rank mate is in the offing if White tries to swing his Rooks into the attack. **Qc6 22. Rd4 Ne4 23. Rel Neg5 24. Qg4 Ba3** It is clear now that the attack has changed hands. **25. Bc3 Rxe1+?** 25 . . . Bb2! would have won on the spot — a finish that is admittedly out of the commonplace, yet a natural enough sequel to Black's previous move. **26. Bxel Re8 27. Bd2 Bc1 28. h4 Bxd2 29. Rxd2 Rel+?** Karpov could still have won comfortably with 29 . . . Qe6!. Allowing the White Rook to check makes all the difference. It has become the custom to label this sort of thing a "time-trouble oversight". But we are not in the mood to listen to excuses. **30. Kh2 Re4 31. f4 Qe6 32. Rd8+ Kf7 33. Rd7+ Kf8 34. Qxe6 Rxe6 35. hxg5 Re7 36. Rxe7 Kxe7 37. g4 Be4 38. Kg3 Bb1 39, a3 1-0.** This extraordinary game should have ended in a draw, as Black can give up his extra piece for the passed pawns when they start to push forward. But Karpov lost on time.

Do I hear it said, in the players' defence, that this was an exciting game? Tush. Is a contest between chess masters going to satisfy us if it has the same merit that might be found in a fairground ride? On any objective view it has to be rated god-awful to lousy, with each of the players thoroughly deserving to lose the game. The most curious thing of all is that, even when Kasparov and Karpov play like clowns against each other, their would-be rivals cannot afford to smile. For against all others they continue to ply the same deadly line of business.

But who makes the profit from their enterprise? It would be interesting to know how many guilders will be travelling from Amsterdam straight into the coffers of the Soviet Sports Committee. That was the destination for 80 per cent of the 2 million Swiss francs K & K took from Seville, according to Kasparov in an interview with a Latvian magazine.

It has to be admitted that bad chess can be more entertaining than good chess, not to mention dull chess. I suppose I have already tacitly admitted it by giving that game.

FIDE seems convinced that the thrills-and-spills approach can enhance the popularity of the game and bring it before a wider audience — in particular, a TV audience.

As a preparation for prostituting the international titles it awards, the world federation is just about to introduce a new "Active Chess" rating system. By "Active Chess" they mean quickplay, and it seems that the very first event of this type to be rated will be the British Open Quickplay Championships, which are a part of the Leeds Chess Congress on the weekend of 18-19 June. There is no difficulty about entering. Just phone the promoters, Leeds Leisure Services, on 0532-462631, and by the end of the month you too can have an international rating at Active Chess. For what it's worth.

George Botterill

New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ
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This England

£3 Book Tokens for entries printed.
(Postcards please.)

A local vicar, the Rev Kevin McGraham, who has known Miss Budd for four years, said yesterday that the final straw had come when she learned that her pet parrot had died in South Africa. *The Guardian* (J Witham)

A million pensioners are needlessly struggling with the intricacies of filling in tax returns that they should never have received at all. But they must complete the forms and pay for postage, even though the Inland Revenue does not want the information, because the law requires that they are returned once they are issued — *Daily Telegraph* (James Scott)

The rector of three parishes near Grantham, Lincolnshire, was banned from driving yesterday and fined £300 for being three times over the alcohol limit. Magistrates in Grantham heard that the Reverend Noel Stone had been drinking communion wine to relieve severe backache — *The Guardian* (J. Claessens)

A prison's chaplains thought their prayers were answered when hundreds of inmates asked to be issued with Bibles. But the old lags had not seen the light in the way the padres hoped. They aimed to use the good book's flimsy pages for rolling cigarettes. — *Daily Mirror* (Amanda Welles)

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